

# **George Bernard Shaw**

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### *Dramatic Background of the Period*

**C**hronologically the Victorian period roughly coincides with the reign of Queen Victoria who ruled over England from 1836 to 1901. The period has been generally regarded as one of the most glorious in the English history. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the outstanding movement in the dramatic field was that of romanticism as against the classicism of earlier European drama. The Romantic Movement did not blossom in French drama until the 1820s, primarily in the work of Victor Hugo (1773-1821), Eugène Scribe (1791-1861), Émile Augier (1820-1889), Alexander Dumas the younger (1824-1825), and Victorien Sardou (1831-1908).

Generally, Victorian literature, as a product of its age, naturally took on its quality of magnitude and diversity. It was many-sided and complex, and reflected both romantically and realistically the great changes that were going on in people's life and thought. Great writers and great works abounded.

In England, the theatre in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had been the amusement of educated classes only. But the English had been relieved of much jeopardy and fear after the fall of Napoleon (1814) and the uneducated people began to improve in tastes, manners and in mind. Drama was one of many signs of that modification and refinement of which those people showed a desire to benefit themselves. Ifor Evans describes the drama of the early nineteenth century as "on the whole deplorable." (Evans: 1976, 190) Consequently, the first half of the century witnessed the arrival of the common people into the theatre with their expectations to see a vigorous kind of drama, full of excitement and written in expressive, ostentatious language; they needed stories of passion, or dread, or lively fun. The nineteenth century saw the drama become, for the first time since the days of Queen Elizabeth, a popular amusement. Educated people and the higher ranks of society stopped attending the theatre. Nonetheless, the plays of the first half of the century were not likely to be endowed with much worth; and, in this period, we reach the low-water mark of the English drama in quality, together with a great increase in quantity.

The English theatre was in terrible creative conditions, in particular due to the lack of new, up-and-coming playwrights. It listed in its chronicles such names as William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), Lord Byron (1788-1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909), Robert Browning (1812-1889), and Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892). Generally, those great romantic poets did not produce important drama. Burlesque and mediocre melodrama reigned supreme on the English stage. Many 19th-century dramatists focused on writing

melodramas. Their often lurid stage effects, improbable plots, stock character types, and naive moral lessons offered little artistic merit—but they were vastly popular.

It was not until the latter part of the century that the English stage again showed signs of life with the advent of Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929) who was the first notable playwright of this movement. He wrote *Michael and His Lost Angel* (1895) which dealt with religious hypocrisy; Sir Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934), who wrote *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1892), a tragedy about a woman who cannot escape her past and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) the wittiest man of his day, wrote one play that has remained alive, the polished, superficial, but still delightful *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

Furthermore, the death of Dion Boucicault (1820-1890), one of the nineteenth century's most popular, creative, and innovative playwrights, and the birth of "Ibsenism" at the hands of George Bernard Shaw, have made that year as a landmark of the modern period which witnessed the death of the old order in the British theatre and the rebirth of that theatre in a new form with a naturalistic treatment of both subject matter and style. (Farr Dietrich: 1989, 1) However, Ibsen's realistic dramas were of great influence on Shaw's thinking. His treatise *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) establishes his belief in the drama of socialism and realism. It is a lecture to his own Fabian Society, a group of socialist reformers, on the seemingly kindred spirit Ibsen, whose plays he knew mostly from the translations of his friend and fellow critic, William Archer. Shaw's lecture, revised and expanded, came to be called *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* when published in 1891. With the emergence of George Bernard Shaw, the society suddenly experienced a renewed interest in theatrical material, especially in plays that began in revolt against the general complacency of the Victorian Age. Real evils and troubles of English life were hidden from view by the self-satisfied attitudes of the upper classes. The dramatic revolt started slowly but soon gained momentum to pave the way for the twentieth century drama.

### *The Playwright*

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) is acclaimed as the most significant British dramatist of the modern era. Though he is best known as a playwright, Shaw was also a respected critic, journalist, novelist, and essayist. A famous social reformer, Shaw wrote plays which dramatized social commentaries, and in 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his achievements. Today, his works are studied in literature classes worldwide and are considered classics of modern drama. Perhaps Nehru of India most nearly succeeded when he said, "Shaw was not only of the greatest figures of the age but one who influenced the thought of vast number of human beings during two generations." (Adam: 1966, 11) Shaw, who at the beginning of his career was regarded in literary circles as a writer without a serious moral purpose, is today looked upon not only as a brilliant wit but also as a profound thinker. He saw the truth and revealed it through art which in his

opinion is the best vehicle of teaching. This great dramatic and literary giant who influenced the English scene for over half a century had annexed the Nobel Prize\* for literature in 1925.

Bernard Shaw was born to a mother who was a singer and a father who was a drunkard. The young Shaw disliked organized education; at age fourteen, he decided the whole schooling system was valueless and promptly dropped out. But he had a passion for learning, so Shaw gave himself an informal education. At twenty he moved to London to continue his studies of the arts. He read voraciously, and he frequented the National Gallery of Dublin, where he studied art and history.

He met, and married, Charlotte Payne-Townshend in 1898. He was an active member of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). He had read Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, and by 1884 he had joined the Fabian Society, an influential group devoted to establishing a socialist democracy in Britain, and the following year, the Socialist League, an organization that had been formed by William Morris and Eleanor Marx after a dispute with H.H Hyndman, the leader of the SDF. But what was puzzling in his life that he might be seen as a controversial and contradictory figure. He was a Marxist and an anti-Marxist, a revolutionary and a reformer. At times he displayed a colossal ignorance of Marxist theory, but his heart remained true to the dreams of socialist, which his Fabian head discarded. As a Fabian, Shaw learned to verbalize his ideas and philosophies. He quickly became a spokesman for the Fabians and their ideals. This gave him his first opportunity to express his beliefs in a public forum, and brought his name to the public as his writing never had.

Generally, his early plays met with little success. They perplexed audiences with their analytic treatment of themes at the time considered inappropriate for the stage. Also puzzling was Shaw's use of wit and paradox, which made the audience uncertain about his viewpoint and the seriousness of his intentions. The first plays received brief runs at best or no productions at all. Shaw liked to classify these plays into two categories: "Plays Pleasant" and "Plays Unpleasant"; in 1898, Shaw published his first six plays together in a volume titled 'Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant'. Shaw classified his first three plays as "Plays Unpleasant" because they force the spectators to face unpleasant social and political problems; such plays were intended, not to entertain their audiences—as traditional Victorian theatre was expected to—but to raise consciousness of exploitation of the laboring class by the unproductive rich.. These plays are: *Widower's Houses* (1892) which mainly deals with the question of slum landlords; *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893), a critical study of the Victorian attitude toward prostitution and women and *The Philanderer* (1898) revolves around women and marriage

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\* When Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925, he refused it at first, but, on learning he could donate the money to a fund for popularizing Scandinavian literature, he accepted the award and gave the money away.

The 'pleasant' plays are *Arms and the Man* (1894), satirizing romantic attitudes toward love and war; *Candida* (1894) is about a female who tries to examine the possibility of enjoying all of the ecstatic excitement of a fall from grace, and still, by holding back at the actual brink of the precipice, to retain, in full measure, her reputation as a pattern of fidelity and virtue. She solves the problem of being immoral and respectable at the same time. Bernard Shaw wrote *The Man of Destiny* in 1895, a one act comedy. In Napoleon, Shaw creates one of his first "superman" characters, an early sketch for Caesar, Jack Tanner, Undershaft, or Higgins. *You Never Can Tell* (1897) is a four-act play which is set in a seaside town and tells the story of Mrs Clandon and her three children, Dolly, Phillip and Gloria, who have just returned to England after an eighteen-year stay in Madeira\*. The children have no idea who their father is and, through a comedy of errors, ends up inviting him to a family lunch. At the same time a dentist named Mr. Valentine has fallen in love with the eldest daughter, Gloria. However, Gloria considers herself a modern woman and claims to have no interest in love or marriage. The play continues with a comedy of errors and confused identities, with the friendly and wise waiter, Walter (most commonly referred to by the characters as "William," because Dolly thinks he resembles Mr. Shakespeare), dispensing his wisdom with the titular phrase "You Never Can Tell."

*The Devil's Disciple* (1897) is a melodrama drawn from the American revolution. It is Shaw's only full-length play with a solely American locale. It illustrates well both Shaw's play on "Puritan" and the pleasures of creative moral thought. As in all good comedies, everything turns out well in the end. Dick Dudgeon, the devil's disciple, is a Puritan of the Puritans. He is brought up in a household where the Puritan religion has died, and become, in its corruption, an excuse for his mother's master passion of hatred in all its phases of cruelty and envy. In such a home the young Puritan finds himself starved of religion, which is the most clamorous need of his nature. Consequently, with pity instead of hatred as his master passion, he pities the devil; takes his side; and champions him, like a true Covenanter against the world. In *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), Shaw highlights his indiscriminate kindness in a manner that flummoxes the audience's expectations of a war lord – his Caesar treats prisoners as guests who are free to leave, a leader who can be kind in cold blood. In the play Cleopatra is a spoiled and vicious 16-year-old child rather than the 38-year-old temptress of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The play depicts Caesar as a lonely and austere man who is as much a philosopher as he is a soldier. The play's outstanding success rests upon its treatment of Caesar as a credible study in magnanimity and original morality rather than as a superhuman hero on a stage pedestal. *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1899) is a sermon against various kinds of folly masquerading as

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\* Madeira is a Portuguese archipelago in the mid Atlantic Ocean . It is one of the Autonomous regions of Portugal.

duty and justice. Shaw closed out the Victorian era with *The Admirable Bashville* (1901), a joking, blank-verse adaptation of his novel *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1882). It is subtitled *An Adventure and set in Morocco*; it focuses on the theme of the futility of vengeance. The most remarkable character is the lady who teaches this futility, Lady Cicely Waynfleet, illustrative of the feminine style in Shavian realism. *Man and Superman* (1902) offers a discussion of Shaw's Great Man theory. In this play, Ann Whitefield woos her newly appointed guardian, John Tanner, and he, in spite of his anti-romantic persona, falls in love with her. He does not love her in the conventional sense, but falls prey to the "Life Force" that she conveys. It is more a matter of sexual attraction than it is of romantic love. *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) gets its form from nineteenth century British melodrama and sentimental comedy, and then infuses into this conventional form very unconventional themes taken from modern, that is post-Ibsen, theater. Shaw gives his audience a lesson on the nature of capitalism. *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1904) is a one-act bit of foolery which is built upon the lines of broad farce. Known as one of Shaw's "discussion plays," *Major Barbara* (1905) is primarily structured through a series of conversations on morality, religion, and socio-political engineering. The primary topic of discussion is what Shaw identifies in the preface as the "Gospel of Saint Andrew Undershaft," that is, the gospel that would promise society's redemption. *Passion, Poison and Petrification* (1905) is a one-act farce intended for cheap and easy productions to benefit The Actors' Orphanage. *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) revolves around the question: When the doctor can cure only one, either an artistic genius or a mundane but deserving friend, whom should he choose? Shaw criticizes despised doctors who are serving despised populations in the inner cities, not as Mother Theresa or Albert Schweitzer\* celebrities, but as perceived failures in their profession. *The Interlude at the playhouse* (1906) is an extremely humorous one-scene playlet. *Getting Married* (1908) is matrimony from the Shavian point of view. It features a cast of family members gathered together for a marriage. The play analyzes and satirizes the status of marriage in Shaw's day, with an especial focus on the necessity of liberalizing divorce laws. *The shewing – up of Blanco Posnet* (1909) it is a one-act play which seems like a sermon in crude melodrama. Blanco Posnet, the protagonist is wrongfully accused of

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\* **Mother Teresa** (1910–1997) was an Albanian Roman Catholic nun with Indian citizenship who founded the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India in 1950. For over 45 years she ministered to the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying, while guiding the Missionaries of Charity's expansion, first throughout India and then in other countries.

**Albert Schweitzer** (1875–1965) was a German theologian, musician, philosopher, and physician. He was born in Kayserberg in the province of Elsass-Lothringen of the German Empire. He received the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize in 1953 for his philosophy of "Reverence for Life", expressed in many ways, but most famously in founding and sustaining the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Lambaréné in Gabon, west central Africa.

horse-theft and sentenced to be hanged. By great good-fortune he is rescued by the testimony of a female witness, Feemy—the local harlot—for whom he has uncharacteristically performed an act of charity. His exoneration is spiritually transforming: His status changes abruptly from pariah to pillar of the community. He does not marry Feemy, but shakes hands with her before they part. *Press Cutting* (1909) burlesques the conservative male reaction to the threat of Women's Suffrage. *The Fascinating Foundling* (1909) is a one-act play subtitled 'A Disgrace to the Author'. It is light exercises on the motif of female mastery of the male. *The Glimpse of Reality* (1909) is a tragedietta (a little tragedy) in one act. *Misalliance* (1910) is an ironic examination of the mating instincts of a varied group of people gathered at a wealthy man's country home on a summer weekend. Most of the romantic interest centers around the host's daughter, Hypatia Tarleton, a typical Shaw heroine who exemplifies his life-long theory that in courtship, women are the relentless pursuers and men the apprehensively pursued. *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910) is a one-act playlet set in London around 1600. Shaw creates another 'unscrupulous' artist in the character of 'Shakespear' in the play. In *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* 'Shakespear' is presented not only as a genuine artist but as an artist like Shaw. *Fanny's First Play* (1911) is an unabashed comedy with layer upon layer of satire building up to the point where virtually everything anyone says has one or more barbs attached. Shaw's play is a delightful confection. Not only does he take aim at his usual targets of British hypocrisy and adulation of hierarchy, but also satirizes low-budget theatricals, dramatic conventions, theatre criticism and even himself. *Androcles and the Lion* (1912) has themes of martyrdom and persecution which are portrayed through the vehicle of comedy. Another point in the play is his position against vivisection, which connected to his philosophy in being a vegetarian. In the play, Shaw uses slapstick humour, verbal wit and physical humour to portray his themes. *Overruled* (1912) deals with how polygamy takes place among ordinary people innocent of all unconventional views concerning it. *Pygmalion* (1912) is about the metamorphosis of a born and grown up in the lowest strata of society girl into a highly respectable Lady. *Great Catherine* (1913) is a thumbnail sketch of Russian court life during the eighteenth century. *The Music-Cure* (1913) is a one-act piece of utter nonsense. *O'Flaherty, V.C.* (1915) is regarded as a minor play in which political figures and army types are parodied and criticized. *The Inca of Perusalem* (1915) is almost a one-act historical comedietta (little comedy) with a prologue. *Augustus Does His Bit* (1916) is a one-act true-to-life farce of crude satire on the military mind. *Annajanska, the Wild Grand Duchess* (1917) is a one-act revolutionary romancelet. *Heartbreak House* (1919) is a three-act Fantasia in the Russian manner on English themes. Shaw exposed, in a country-house setting on the eve of war, the spiritual bankruptcy of the generation responsible for the war's bloodshed. *Back to Methuselah* (1921) is a five-act play with an elaborate preface on creative evolution as the creed of the twentieth century. Man must work hard and feel himself to be fully used if he is to develop in the future. It is subtitled as 'Metabiological Pentateuch'. *Jitta's Atonement* (1922) is a three-act play. It is



an adaptation of an Austrian play by Siegfried Trebitsch, who translated many of Shaw's plays into German. *Saint Joan* (1923) is a chronicle religious play, six scenes and an epilogue. Joan had been wrongly executed by corrupt in 1455. Almost 500 years later in 1909, Joan was finally officially beatified and in 1920 canonized as a saint. Bernard Shaw uses records of the original trial and appeals preserved by the Roman Catholic Church as his primary sources for the play. *The Apple Cart* (1929) is a three-act political extravaganza. *Too True to be Good* (1931) is another three-act political extravaganza. One of the themes of the play is Shaw's belief that most of the ills of humanity are caused by overindulgence. *Village Wooing* (1933) is an amusing trifle, consisting of three conversations between a man and a woman. Shaw's unusual views on marriage are once more given an airing. *On The Rocks* (1933) is a two-act political comedy. *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* (1934) is a two-act play with a prologue. Shaw again takes up the theme of Creative Evolution. *The Six of Calais* (1934) is a one-act medieval war story. *The Millionairess* (1936) is a four-act Jonsonian comedy with social criticism. It revolves around the idea that earning money is a talent. *Cymbeline Refinished* (1937) is a revised work for William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in which Shaw challenges early Elizabethan dramatic verse. *Geneva* (1938) is a fancied page of history in three acts. *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* (1939) is a full-length comedy which may be described as a true history that never happened. Among the characters who meet King Charles II is Isaac Newton, the great mathematician. *Buoyant Billions* (1947) is Shaw's last full-length work written when he was in his nineties in which he directly and of course despairingly reacts to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Shaw creates a mythic dialogue between a "Father" and "Son". *Shakes versus Shaw* (1949) is a novelty marionette play, in which puppet figures of Shaw and Shakespeare literally fight, or spar, comparing their dramatic achievements, with puppets representing and quoting some of their iconic characters. *Farfetched Fables* (1950) includes a character who suggests that atomic bombs are not satisfying or feasible because the Bomb destroys the cities, and kills the women, and therefore the human race, so through the ultimate deterrent factor war will be obsolete. Finally, Shaw's play *Why She Would Not* (1950) was unpublished at the time of Shaw's death, and has never been performed. The transcript is in the British museum.

Shaw is a playwright with a socialistic purpose, and although he expresses himself through drama (mainly comedic), he did not go for cheap laughter. He uses comedy and wit as a means to an end, and if he does not feel this end is met, he considers his efforts a failure. His readers may at least keep in mind Shaw's own earnest declaration: "All genuinely intellectual work is humorous." (Bax: 1942, 10) But he considers too much laughter at his comedies a failure, as he believes it is distracting and physically fatiguing. And even though it would be easy to construe some of Shaw's remarks, witticisms and opinions as harsh and conceited, the truth is he writes for an audience whom he believes to be intelligent, and with the faith that society has hope to improve.

George Bernard Shaw was part of a relatively new generation of thinkers who recognized that social change could be accomplished through the arts. In plays like *Candida*, he gave us a glimpse backward into the older comedies of manners, stretched us with dialogue full of moral passion and intellectual conflict, and asked us to see the symbolism in farcical situations. In short, Shaw helped usher the theatre into the 20th century.

### *Shaw's Social and Political Ideas and Criticism*

Shaw declared that each social class strove to serve its own ends, and that the upper and middle classes won in the struggle while the working class lost. He condemned the democratic system of his time, saying that workers, brutally exploited by greedy employers, lived in abject poverty and were too ignorant and apathetic to vote intelligently. He believed this deficiency would eventually be corrected by the emergence of long-lived supermen with experience and intelligence enough to govern properly. He called the developmental process elective breeding but it is sometimes referred to as Shavian eugenics, largely because he thought it was driven by a “Life Force”<sup>\*</sup> that led women—subconsciously—to select the mates most likely to give them superior children. The outcome Shaw envisioned is dramatized in *Back to Methuselah*, a monumental play depicting human development from its beginning in the Garden of Eden until the distant future.

George Bernard Shaw is an active political man with a socialist agenda. He has a vision shown in a (letter to Henry James of 17 January 1909):

*I, as a Socialist, have had to preach, as much as anyone, the enormous power of the environment. We can change it; we must change it; there is absolutely no other sense in life than the task of changing it. What is the use of writing plays, what is the use of writing anything, if there is not a will which finally moulds chaos itself into a race of gods. (Shaw: 1909, 5)*

He regards the establishment of socialism by the emancipation of land and industrial capital from individual and class ownership as the final goal. But on how to achieve it, he differs greatly from the Marxists. He is against the means of violent or armed struggle in achieving the goal of socialism; he also has a distrust of the uneducated working class in fighting against capitalists. This reformist views causes him a painful, often conscious,

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<sup>\*</sup> In the 1920s, George Bernard Shaw developed his theory of Creative Evolution, by which he stated that the Life Force can only keep evolving by the input of special individuals whose new ideas force people to develop and move forward. Life Force is a kind of immanent Holy Spirit that would help to improve and eventually perfect the world. Shaw believed that to help in this conscious purpose, human beings must live longer in order to use their intellectual maturity. They must be healthier, without the debilitating force of poverty, and—most important— they must be interested in purpose, not simply pleasure.

inner conflict between his sincere desire for the new world and his inability to break out of the snobbish intellectual isolation throughout his life and work.

As a member of a capitalist society, writing about and speaking to this society, Shaw is largely concerned with the political problems which he believes to be of moment to such a society. And in the later plays, while posing these problems and criticizing the society under scrutiny for not facing them constructively, he seldom fails to imply - with both his choice of situations and his handling of them - a condemnation of society as it is and a need for its being changed. Without authorizing his drama to advocate doctrinal matter, and without letting it assume a dogmatic manner, Shaw nevertheless manages often enough to display the need for political and social reconstruction. In reference to Fabian philosophy, Shaw hoped to revolutionize the political economy of England that exploits workers through an unequal distribution of the nation's wealth. Shaw consistently urges the proletariat to question every law and every custom that keep them in their place. He finds drama as a suitable means to carry out his political and social ideals as a propagandist. He regards the stage as a proper place to teach people since the previous Victorian playwrights said nothing about the bleak world the audiences lived in. He admires Henrik Ibsen's plays since they touch greatness by sparking political and philosophical debate. Using the stage as a forum to cross-examine society, Ibsen shows Shaw how theatre could serve ideal thoughts.

His abomination of capitalism only increasing with his declining years, Shaw's later plays are in essence a critique, or exposure, of capitalism, especially as it existed in the society he knew best, the British. And he sometimes succeeded brilliantly in pointing up the oppositions within this society. As a communist in theory and a playwright by profession, he received Marxist applause from R. Palme Dutt, who declared that Shaw exposed capitalist society with a passionate intensity that has never been equaled by any writer of English.

Shaw has one great intellectual virtue: he has been taken in by almost everything else but never by capitalism. He succumbs to Nietzscheism, Lamarckism, vegetarianism, imperialism, fascism, Stalinism, anti-vivisectionism and Fabianism; but he knows how rotten are the internal social workings of capitalist society and he never stops saying so. As a result his marvelously composed pamphlets, polemics and prefaces are full of some of the most expressive and effective anti-capitalist agitation of our times. His best writing was always in terms of particularities, always very concrete and limited.

For Shaw socialism is not a mass movement in which the working class plays a principal role; he mistrusts the masses of people, the Yahoos as he calls them. What he has in common with the other Fabians, the more routine reformists, is precisely this distrust of the mass. What Shaw wants above all is a society run according to the rational prescriptions of Victorian intellectuals – gentlemen, every one of them. His hero – the naturally muted British version of the Superman – is the “efficient civil servant” who would do things right. Unlike the great Marxists, Shaw is fundamentally alien to the

democratic and equalitarian spirit that has enthused all genuine socialist movements; his conception of socialism is thoroughly bureaucratic. He is ready to borrow from every non-capitalist theory so long as it was not committed to a belief in the independent historical role of the masses. That is why Shaw could admire Stalin but could never appreciate the democratic idealism which is the underpinning of Marx's and Lenin's life-work. To the end Shaw is the petty bourgeois, resentful of his rulers but hating the "Yahoos."

As a dramatist, Shaw's treatment of political matters in his later plays is very obvious and direct for the first time, with the problem of the British government in *The Apple Cart* (1929) as well as in *On the Rocks* (1933) and with the problem of international government in *Geneva* (1936). *The Apple Cart* exposes the unreality of both democracy and royalty as idealists conceive them. *On the Rocks* is a political fantasy in two acts which contains a passionate and persuasive attack on racialism and in *Geneva*, Shaw satirizes characters representing Hitler, Mussolini and Franco as they defend their records at the Court of International Justice.

### *The Fabian Society*

The Fabians were a small but influential group of British social theorists during the period from the 1880s to the 1920s. They espoused their own form of socialism and had a major influence on social thought, especially on the British Labour Party and through it on British social and economic policies. The loosely organized Fabian Society included numerous prominent intellectuals, and, with diminished influence, is still active in the 21st century. The founders of the Fabian Society named it after the Roman general Quintus Fabius Maximus (280 BC-203 BC), who had been nicknamed the Cunctator (the delayer) for his tendency to avoid confrontation with the formidable Carthaginian warrior, Hannibal, in the Second Punic War. Instead of attacking directly, Fabius gradually weakened the opposition by having his army follow the Carthaginians from a distance and harass their outposts. Likewise, the founders of the Fabian Society resolved to make their approach to socialism gradual. Though opposing overt rebellion, they protested against capitalistic practices in ways that were constitutional rather than revolutionary.

The Fabian Society was formally founded on January 4, 1884, with R. Pease as secretary. Sidney Webb joined in 1885, and became the leading Fabian theorist and expositor. (Bentley: 1947, 2) Other early and influential members include George Bernard Shaw; Annie Besant; Keir Hardie, the founder of the Independent Labour Party and the first Labour member of Parliament; Ramsay MacDonald, later prime minister; Graham Wallas, writer of books on political theory; author H.G. Wells; and Beatrice Potter, who married Sidney Webb.\*

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\* *Sidney James Webb*, (1859–1947) was a British socialist, economist and reformer who is typically mentioned in the same breath as his wife, Beatrice Webb.(Wikipedia)

The principles of the Society were first presented in the book known as *Basis* (1887). It rejected the economic views of Marxism as expounded by the Social Democratic Federation, founded in 1881. The essential aim of Fabian socialism was the extension of state control in economic and social matters by gradualist methods of propaganda and organization. The first of the books which made the Society famous was *Fabian Essays*, (1889), edited by Bernard Shaw. The many hundreds of short pamphlets which have appeared under the collective title of Fabian Tracts had even more effect upon British socialism. Fabian Tract No. 2, written by George Bernard Shaw, was issued as a manifesto and warrants full reproduction for its expository value:

*A Manifesto*

*The Fabians are associated for the purpose of spreading the following opinions held by them, and discussing their practical consequences. That, under existing circumstances, wealth cannot be enjoyed without dishonour, or foregone without misery. That it is the duty of each member of the State to provide for his or her wants by his or her own Labour. That a life interest in the Land and Capital of the nation is the birth-right of every individual born within its confines and that access to this birth-right should not depend upon the will of any private person other than the person seeking it. That the most striking result of our present system of farming out the national Land and Capital to private individuals has been the division of Society into hostile classes, with large appetites and no dinner at one extreme and large dinner and no appetites at the other. That the practice of entrusting the Land of the nation to private persons in the hope that they will make the best of it has been discredited by the consistency with which they have made the worst of it: and that the Nationalization of the Land in some form is a public duty. That the pretensions of Capitalism to encourage Invention and to distribute its benefits in the fairest way attainable, have been discredited by the experience of the nineteenth century. That, under the existing system of leaving the National Industry to organize itself, Competition has the effect of rendering adulteration, dishonest dealing, and inhumanity compulsory. That since Competition among producers admittedly secures the public the most satisfactory products, the State should compete with all its might in every department of production. That such restraints upon Free Competition as the penalties for infringing the Postal monopoly, and the withdrawal of workhouse and prison labour from the markets, should be abolished. That no branch of Industry should be carried on at a profit by the central administration. That the Public Revenue should be raised by a direct Tax: and that the most central administration should have no legal power to hold back for the replenishment of the Public Treasury any portion of the proceeds of the Industries administered by them. That the State should compete with private individuals-especially with parents in providing*

*happy homes for children so that every child may have a refuge from the tyranny or neglect of its natural custodians. That Men no longer need special political privileges to protect them against Women: and the sexes should henceforth enjoy equal rights. That no individual should enjoy any Privilege in consideration of services rendered to the State by his or her parents or other relations. That the State should secure a liberal education and an equal share in the National Industry to each of its units. That the established Government has no more right to call itself the State than the smoke of London has to call itself the weather. That we had rather face a Civil War than such another country of suffering as the present one has been.*

(Fabian Tract No. 2)

It is obvious that in “The Manifesto”, Shaw provides a prelude of what Fabian Socialism is about.

Bernard Shaw found in the Fabian society as a corpse of liberal middle-class intelligentsia. Together with his fellows Fabians, he regarded the establishment of socialism by the liberation of land and industrial capital from individual and class ownership as the final target. Though Shaw ignored a few individuals and never allowed beggars to come any way near him, he lived with high Fabian ideals and was one of the greatest men who promoted the welfare of the world. Shaw felt that people valued meaningless customs and sacrificed the fundamental values and were misled and ruined by not shedding their ignorance. Hence Shaw ignored giving alms to beggars because he felt that our charity to them may satisfy their temporary needs, but begging will go on for ever. Therefore he advised us to exterminate poverty once for all, poverty, according to Shaw, was the deadliest of all sins. In *Major Barbara*, Undershaft defines poverty by saying that it is:

*The worst of crimes. All the other crimes are virtues beside it: all the other dishonors are chivalry itself by comparison. Poverty plights whole cities; spreads horrible pestilences; strikes dead the very souls of all who come within sight, sound or smell of it.*

( Act III, 81)

Sidney J. Webb and his wife, Beatrice Potter Webb, stood at the core of the Fabian Society. They wrote numerous studies of industrial Britain, alternative economic arrangements (especially cooperatives) and pamphlets for political reform. The essence of Fabian doctrine lay in Sidney Webb’s theory of the continuity of development from capitalism to socialism. Webb argued that the economic position of the workers had improved in the 19th century, was still improving and might be expected to continue to improve. Fabians literature seems to ignore class distinctions and shows no belief at all in a class struggle as the instrument of change. Fabians opposed direct workers’ control of socialized industries and favored exclusive parliamentary control. The Fabian importance faded in the 1930s.

### *Shaw's Concept of Superman*

The search for the ideal man is pervasive in literature, beginning with the epic hero in the Western tradition and descending through history under various names, with even more varied ideals. The Modern period in British literature was not divorced from this tradition any more than other periods of crisis in history. The Romantic ideal was struggling under the sooty wheel of industrialism, and English imperialism was in its decline as their righteous self-justification wavered. On the island itself, internal strife, swelling poverty, and an unstable world balance of power contributed to a weakened national identity for the British, and produced in its intelligentsia a craving for evolution. Shaw's assumption discloses two important points: firstly, Shaw's earlier interest in the idea of breeding a species superior to the contemporary, and secondly, his search for political reform not only in Britain but also in all Europe. Some critics, such as Arthur Ganzel (1988) and Shelley Morris (1991), see Shaw's quest for the superman as an extenuation of the Victorian notion of heroism promulgated by many renowned writers such as Carlyle, Kingsley, Tennyson and others. Other critics, such as Harley Parker and Kiernan Raymond, conclude that Shaw's notion of the superman is a reaction to the collapse of the Victorian and the Edwardian heroic way of life and politics during the late decades of the nineteenth century and the early decade of the twentieth. Some other critics, such as Marshal Croydon, attribute Shaw's interest in the superman to his much-cherished hope in the advancement of state education and eugenics.

The term "Übermensch" (German for 'superman') first appeared in Goethe's *Faust* (1808) and later in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1892). Nietzsche was influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) a German philosopher who proposed that a single all-encompassing "Will" was the cosmic force that drives nature and individuals to act as they do. Nietzsche believes that when man learns to control and suppress his brutal desires and overpowering feelings, he will turn into the superman whose mind will govern his body according to the natural law of "The Will to Power". Nietzsche perceives this power as a fundamental force inherent in nature. This, according to Nietzsche, is the overarching goal of humanity, the one that transcends individual goals or those of a cultural group. The Superman would be morally and intellectually superior to the average man and he is an embodiment of absolute power. Nietzsche insisted upon the vital necessity of the present human race to be replaced by a stronger one. He is one who towers far above the vast multitudes of people and has the power to compel upon them his own sovereign will. The Superman arrogantly deters all suffering and misery and is a complete stranger to the ideal of sorrow and service as liberating forces. Conceived as it is, the concept of superman in Nietzsche is completely devoid of Knowledge and Love and the Superman becomes a destructive and malevolent force. He becomes the deification of the demon in man. To Nietzsche, it is only "the will to power" that makes the evolution of higher species possible. Therefore, strong and competent individuals with beautiful and

healthy bodies and minds should be regenerated for Europe to progress and for the superman to emerge. While Nietzsche professes that only heroic men will be able to make higher civilizations, Shaw states that the heroes are there. They are the women whose will to power manifests itself in several ways that include their control and management of their emotions and desires, their command of sexual selection, and their control of the process of reproduction.

In his philosophical play *Man and Superman*, George Bernard Shaw modifies his superman in the fashion of both Nietzsche's "Übermensch" and Schopenhauer's "Will to Live", as presented in *The World as Will and Idea*. Shaw draws on both philosophy and biological theory for his Life Force theory, which became a common theme in his work, especially in his prefaces. Nowhere else, however, is it so fully explored as in the *Don Juan in Hell* segment found in Act III, where Ann Whitefield transposes into Dona Ana de Ulloa and Tanner becomes Don Juan Tenario. They debate the relative merits of heaven and earth with the devil and "the statue," Ana's dead father.

In his essay entitled "The Perfect Wagnerite" written in 1890, Shaw enthusiastically presents the issue of the superman by affirming that "the majority of men at present [1890] in Europe have no business to be alive; and no serious progress will be made until we address ourselves earnestly and scientifically to the task of producing trustworthy human material for society." (Shaw, 1986: 242). In short, Shaw advocates the necessity to breed a race of men in whom the life-giving impulses predominate.

Marshal Croydon correctly observes that at this stage of his career, Shaw "must have lost his faith in the evolutionary doctrine of progress, at least in the quick, contemporary progress of the Western society" (Croydon, 1971: 62). Croydon maintains that Shaw's belief in an evolutionary progress has gained momentum under the influence of the writings of Plato, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Samuel Butler. He continues that though Shaw appreciated Butler's argument against Darwinism, Nietzsche's ideas of the superman, and Schopenhauer's concept of life as "will to live", their ideas did not provide him with a full, consistent philosophy by which man's progress would become a reality within a definite period of time. As a result, it takes Shaw some thirty years of investigation and contemplation, ranging from his essay "The Perfect Wagnerite" in 1890, his play *Man and Superman* in 1903, and finally his *Back to Methuselah* in 1921, to arrive at a "Life Force Religion" in which "intelligence would act as the almighty." To Shaw, "Life Force" is the power that would create superior beings to be equal to gods and to solve all the social, moral, and metaphysical problems of human society.

Roppen maps out the development of Shaw's theory of the superman as promulgated in both *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah*. He tracks Shaw's thought to the original sources to which Shaw himself largely refers. He skillfully points out that the moral values of Shaw's superman embody Shaw's reaction to the vileness of the "political man" who is the unfortunate product of corrupt democracy and aggressive



**Darwinism.** In his justification of Shaw's interest in human values and virtues, Roppen writes:

*In Shaw's campaign for longevity there is a hierarchy of values and virtues, some concerned with nearer tasks, others pointing to the ultimate ideal. Where Shaw's intention is to show that an evolutionary 'jump' is necessary to generate man as a social being, he does, in passages of witty and searching satire, effectively express his zest for moral awareness, self-discipline, earnestness and sense of responsibility. Yet these are means rather than ends, virtues rather than values, all bound up with human conduct in society and directed upon activity and collective effort. (Roppen: 1975, 395).*

The question which was often raised against Nietzsche's cry for the Superman (What kind of person is this Superman to be?) is answered in Shaw's "The Revolutionist's Handbook", an appendix attached to *Man and Superman*. In the Handbook, Shaw envisages the superman as "some sort of good looking philosopher athlete" (R.H, 216). Shaw's eugenic paradigm is based on the process of selection in which, in Kevin Austin's words, the "old, unconscious fertility" is to be replaced by a new "conscious fertility", so that only the intelligent and the self-controlled man would survive. Shaw's method of breeding is teleological and purposive. The first step in the direction of the making of the Superman is assigned to the progressive woman. Naturally, in Shaw's view, woman has the ascendancy in this evolutionary process of breeding for she is the only one who can eliminate the useless members of the society through conscious selection the way the bees instinctively purge their cells of the idle drone. In his "Revolutionist's Handbook" Shaw continues to affirm,

*One thing at least is clear to begin with. If a woman can, by careful selection of a father, and nourishment of herself, produce a citizen with efficient senses, sound organs and a good digestion, she should clearly be secured a sufficient reward for that natural service to make her willing to undertake and repeat it.*

(R.H, 246)

Such selection aims at generating an intelligent person, a philosopher-artist, possibly, like Shaw himself. Shaw has rejected the optimistic view of Darwinian progress. By accentuating the recent history of the Americans who used to dip a Negro in kerosene and set him on fire, and the English officers who inflicted all types of torture on the subjects of their colonies, Shaw finds no difference between the brutality of the primitive and the civilized man. (R.H, 229) Nevertheless, all of Shaw's efforts to question socio-political mores are subsumed by his spiritual purpose. All are meant to help free the

human spirit in its striving toward the creation of a better and more intelligent person, the creation of a superman, the creation, finally, of an ideal dogma.

### *The Drama and Theatre of Ideas*

Shaw held that art should serve social purposes by reflecting human life, revealing social discrepancies and educating the common people. Being a drama critic, Shaw directed his attacks on the Neo-Romantic tradition and the fashionable drawing-room drama. His criticism was witty, sharp, and often brilliant. He was strongly against the credo of “art for art’s sake” held by those decadent aesthetic artists. In his critical essays, he violently condemned the “well made” but cheap, hollow plays which filled the English theater of the late 19th century to meet the low taste of the middle class. Shaw introduced a drama of greater nuance and complexity. Replacing hackneyed situations and stock characters with complex turns of events and subtleties of characterizations, his dramas showed a marked departure from the conventions of his time. He favored Ibsen’s presentation of radical ideas and paved the way for a new kind of theatre in England.

Terms like ‘dialectical drama’, ‘problem play’, ‘thesis play’, and ‘drama of discussion’ are usually associated with the term ‘drama of ideas’ and are often used interchangeably. Shaw himself prefers the term ‘drama of discussion’ in analyzing the technical novelty of Ibsen’s plays in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. He says,

*a new technical factor in the art of popular stage-play making which every considerable playwright has been thrusting under their noses night after night for a whole generation. This technical factor in the play is the discussion.*

(Shaw: 1986,160 )

Wilson Knight argues that Shaw’s drama of ideas is related philosophically to Plato and Hegel, economically to Marx and dramatically to Ibsen. (Knight: 1965, 119) John Gassner says that Henrik Ibsen created the genre of drama of ideas; Shaw propagated and developed it. “Ibsen was the creator, and Shaw was his prophet.” (Gassner: 1965, 71)

In fact, the element of discussion in his plays of ideas constitutes the core of Bernard Shaw’s dramatic achievements. He uses discussion as a sharp weapon in shooting his ideas to the spectators who should not be involved in the enjoyment of a past time or entertainment, but rather in these ideas. “The weapons of dramatic genius were the ability to manipulate the discussion of interesting moral problems with the framework of a naturalistic drama so as to involve the audience [who] are not flattered spectators killing an idle hour... [but] quietly creatures sitting at a play.” (Jones: 1972, 59) Perhaps Shaw’s greatest contribution to dramatic literature is his ability to blend a relentless examination of morality’s complexities with winking wit and tragi-comic situations.

Shaw has often been referred to for contradicting himself but he recognized the paradoxical aspects of life and people. In his plays, he wanted the reader or audience

member to draw their own truths as he presented every angle to a situation. Shaw enjoyed perplexing the expectations of audience members as he created characters that defied categorization. He often underscores their habits of self-deception so that audience members can recognize similar tendencies to deceive themselves. Just as his words are paradoxical, so his characters are too because Shaw enjoyed the play of oppositional forces.

As a satirist Shaw is outstanding. His sense of the absurd is brilliant and his effort to see all sides of the social and political picture is one of his virtues. With a bitter wit, and a good eye and ear for the behavior of the upper classes, Shaw is the foremost social critic of his time, and to be sure, the leading satirist. Even today he is eminent for his critical view of upper class hypocrites. And he dramatizes them with subtlety, witty repartee, and with obvious flair and fun. Even the poor are derided for their stupidity and folly. For him, fools exist in all classes. And he shows them for what they are. One of his main dramatic technical contributions is that he creates brilliant and funny dialectical arguments that explicated different viewpoints rather than preaching about society's ills, so that in Shaw's plays, everyone in one way or another is scrutinized and analyzed; no one escapes his eye.

### *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*

In 1891, Bernard Shaw published his lectures which mainly concentrated on Ibsen to the Fabian Society in 1890 under the title *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Shaw brings out a new edition of this book in 1913, adding a section on Ibsen's last four plays: *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and *When We Dead Awaken*. In spite of Shaw's claim in the preface of 1891 edition that he had not written "a critical essay on the poetic beauties of Ibsen, but simply an exposition of Ibsenism, I offer to my readers to make what they can of", (Shaw: 1986, 35) this brilliant pamphlet contains the heart of Shaw's Ibsen criticism. It is a distinct contribution to that productive field of modern philosophy sarcastically dramatized by Ibsen, and rhapsodically concretized by Nietzsche. Archibald Henderson believes that this work may be described as an ideological distillation of Ibsen as an ethical and moral critic of contemporary civilization (Henderson: 1911, 409). Nonetheless, this booklet represents a critical defense of Henrik Ibsen against the traditionalist disagreement. Shaw praises Ibsen for having reduced Victorian morality to a tragic absurdity in his plays. Refutation of "duty" by females, Ibsen's implicit theme in *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, was justified by Bernard Shaw as an instance of the general validity of discarding outmoded traditions and principles. This

*Repudiation of established opinion, and specious morality, we may note parenthetically, is recurrent in the work of latter-day practitioners of drama of ideas, such as Brecht and Sartre. Brecht's work often culminates in revolutionary irony; Sartre's in existentialist tragedy.* (Gassner: 1965, 77)

Furthermore, Gassner observes that Shaw regards himself superior to Shakespeare in the realm of thought and to consider Ibsen more useful for his times than Shakespeare, and more useful, too, than many a contemporary naturalist. Richard Farr Dietrich observed that Shaw's *Quintessence of Ibsenism* was, among other things, a clever semantic strategy to regain the initiative for art in a world increasingly conquered by scientific materialism. (Dietrich: 1989, 14) Shaw sees Ibsen as a prophet of human evolution, presenting in dramatic parables the social and individual struggle that arise out of evolution's uneven progression.

Written by a young man who had failed in the private world of art as a novelist but who was beginning to succeed in the public world as a critic, pamphleteer, and gadfly, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* designates Shaw as a gregarious person. Having come to an understanding of his social alienation as more an evolutionary phenomenon than a family condition—that is, he was separated from others not so much because his father's drunkenness had brought isolation on the family as because he was more highly evolved—he proceeds to classify people according to how evolved they are. He divides the world into Realists (1%), Idealists (29%), and Philistines (70%), (Shaw: 1986, 50) in descending order of evolution, based on people's attitudes toward evolutionary social change. 'The Philistines' are satisfied with things as they are and show neither intellectual inquisitiveness nor artistic responsiveness. They neither construct nor defy doctrines or ideals. Obviously, they constitute the majority. An ideal example of this type is Helmer, Nora's husband, in *A Doll's House*. The 'Idealists' usually mask actualities with fancies and they desperately shielded illusions, making belief in them. The Idealist, who has taken shelter with the ideals because he hates himself and is ashamed of himself, thinks that all this is so much for the better. To him, "human nature, naturally corrupt, is held back from ruinous excesses only by self-denying conformity to the ideals." (Shaw: 1986, 52) Dr. Relling in *The Wild Duck* announces that "ideals" are facades and that a good old-fashioned Norwegian word for them is "lies". And, finally, there are the 'Realists' "to which a man like Ibsen and no doubt Shaw himself belong "who dare to pull the masks off things that idealists have placed on them." (Gassner: 1965, 79). The Realist, "who has come to have a deep respect for himself and faith in the validity of his own will, thinks it so much the worse." (Shaw: 1986, 52) To him "all ideals are only swaddling clothes which man has outgrown, and which insufferably impede his movements." (Shaw: 1986, 55) Consequently, the common enemy Ibsen and Shaw fight is not the Philistine but the idealist. Nevertheless, no wonder that the idealist and the realist cannot agree. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw says:

*The realist at last loses patience with ideals altogether, and sees in them only something to blind us, something to numb us, something to murder self in us, something whereby, instead of resisting death, we can disarm it by committing suicide.*  
(Shaw: 1986, 55)

The Idealist says, “Realism means egotism; and egotism means depravity.” (Shaw: 1986, 55). The Realist asserts that when a man abnegates the will to live and be free in a world of the living and the free, seeking only to conform to ideals for the sake of being, not himself, but “a good man,” then he is morally dead and rotten, “and must be left unheeded to abide his resurrection, if that by good luck arrive before his bodily death.” (Shaw: 1986, 55).

Shaw finds Ibsen’s character types involved in a conflict of unsettled ideals, the secretly ambivalent Idealists hypocritically defending and enforcing ideals to the death, the Philistines contentedly or dreadfully going along with the Idealists, and the lonely Realist struggling to get the rest to change ideals to accord with human growth. He sees that “the real slavery of today is slavery to ideals of goodness.” (Dietrich: 1989, 69) Each is imbued with a will to power (the aggressive phase of the Dionysian life impulse or the Darwinian survival instinct) and thus is in conflict with the other as each seeks to control his or her milieu or self. Such conflict is vigorous if it is an incitement to development or creativity, as Shaw emphasized, but Ibsen more often showed its destructive, frustrated side.

*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is today generally understood as providing an enlightening, if limited, commentary on Ibsen’s dramatic vision, as well as a prospectus for Shaw’s efforts as a New Dramatist and an expression of Shaw’s private search for identity. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* Bernard Shaw showed that drama could answer better than any other medium his need for both private expression and participation in the public forum. The book did much to facilitate the initial change, bring Ibsen to critical attention, and awaken theatergoers to the possibilities of socially conscious drama.

### *The Oldest Profession in the World: Mrs. Warren’s Profession*

For many centuries, the only work path open to women that was referred to as a “Profession” was prostitution. Today, it is the only profession open to women that is against the law. It has been thought that prostitution (at least in the modern sense) cannot have emerged before the use of money, which can only have taken place after the beginnings of several trades. As for its claims of being “the oldest profession,” hunting, midwifery, gardening or teaching may outrank it. In the ancient world a type of religious prostitution was practiced in Cyprus (Paphos) and in Corinth, where the temple counted more than a thousand prostitutes (hierodules), according to Strabo (63/64 BC, AD 24, ?) , a Greek historian (Henderson: 1999, 12) It was widely used in Sardinia and in some of the Phoenician cultures, usually in honor of the goddess ‘Ashtart.’ The Phoenicians probably carried it to other ports of the Mediterranean Sea, in such areas as Sicily, Asia Minor and Syria.

In ancient Greek society prostitutes were independent and sometimes influential women who were required to wear distinctive dress and pay taxes. Some similarities have been found between the Greek hetaera and the Japanese oiran, complex figures that are

perhaps in an intermediate position between prostitution and courtisanerie.\* Some prostitutes in ancient Greece, known as the Lais, were famous for their beauty as well as their company and charged extraordinary sums for their services. In the 6th century B.C., Solon (638 BC-558 BC), an Athenian statesman and lawmaker, instituted the first of Athens' brothels and, with the earnings from this enterprise, built a temple dedicated to Aphrodite Pandermo, patron goddess of this commerce. The Greek word for prostitute is porne, derived from the verb pernemi (to sell), with the evident modern evolution.

In ancient Rome, while there were some commonalities with the Greek system, as the Empire grew prostitutes were often foreign slaves caught, bought or raised for that purpose. Enslavement into prostitution was sometimes used as a legal punishment against "free" women who committed criminal acts. A large brothel found in Pompeii, called the Lupanar, attests to the widespread use of prostitutes around Rome and its vicinities. (Henderson: 1999, 22) Life expectancy for prostitutes was generally low, but some managed to get free and establish themselves as practitioners of folk medicine.

During the Middle Ages, prostitution was commonly found in urban areas. Although all forms of sexual activity outside of marriage were regarded as sinful by the Roman Catholic Church, prostitution was tolerated because it supposedly prevented the greater evils of rape, sodomy and masturbation. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), a philosopher and theologian, held that prostitution was a necessary and unavoidable evil: just as a well-ordered palace needed a good sewer, so a well-ordered city needed brothels.

After the decline of the Roman Empire, many prostitutes were still slaves. However, religious campaigns against slavery and the growing market economy turned prostitution back into a business. By the High Middle Ages town governments permitted prostitution outside the city walls beyond the control of the authorities. Indeed, in France and Germany certain streets were set aside for this practice. In London the brothels of Southwark were owned by the Bishop of Winchester. Still later, it became common in the major towns and cities of Southern Europe to establish public brothels, while outlawing any prostitution taking place elsewhere. In much of Northern Europe a *laissez-faire* attitude seemed to predominate.

By the end of the 15th century, attitudes hardened against prostitution with the advent of the Protestant Reformation. Many German towns closed their brothels to eliminate prostitution and the sexually transmitted diseases it fostered. In some places, prostitutes had to distinguish themselves by particular signs, such as having very short hair, no hair at all or wearing veils. In some cultures, prostitutes were the only women allowed to sing or act in theatrical performances.

In the 19th century, legalized prostitution became a public controversy as France and then the United Kingdom passed the Contagious Diseases Acts, legislation that

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\* The practice or profession of being a courtesan.

mandated pelvic examinations for suspected prostitutes. Many early feminists fought for their repeal, either because prostitution should be illegal and therefore not governmentally regulated or because these degrading examinations are forced upon women. This legislation applied not only to the United Kingdom and France, but also to their overseas colonies.\*

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* was written in 1893-94 and published in *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898). For three decades, it was forbidden on public stages by the Censorship, which considered its content to be immoral and improper for the public stage since the profession is prostitution, and the theme is that virtue is impossible in a capitalistic society. In this play, George Bernard Shaw has depicted the attitude and thoughts society has towards prostitution. Shaw's main intention is to draw the attention to the truth that prostitution is caused by poverty and not by female wantonness. Shaw also wanted his play to expose the fact that prostitution is an international commerce profitable both for capitalists and for cities.

Vivie Warren is a twenty-two self-possessed college student who intends to make her fortune by doing calculations for engineers, electricians, and insurance companies. Her mostly absent mother whom she hardly knows has paid for her expensive upbringing and education. While Vivie is staying with a family friend in the country, her mother arrives with the tough and slightly vicious Sir George Crofts, and platonic friend Praed, a romantic old artist. Vivie introduces them to her charming, penniless local boyfriend Frank Gardner. But when Frank's father, the Reverend Samuel Gardner, arrives it seems he may have known Mrs. Warren from the murky days of old. Vivie is somewhat contemptuous of her blowsy mother, but when they are alone, Mrs. Warren tells her of her hard life and confesses she made her money from brothels. Vivie's contempt turns to admiration. However, Crofts is after Vivie, and her curt refusal leads him to tell her that he and her mother are still partners in the brothels which are still making a great deal of money. He also tells her that Frank, with whom she has been billing and cooing, is her half-brother, both sharing the Reverend Gardner as their father. Poor Vivie returns to London to begin working and refuses any more money from her mother. Frank arrives and when she tells him of her mother's profession it is clearly all over between them—he will not take Mrs. Warren's money and he leaves Vivie a goodbye note. Mrs. Warren arrives attempting reconciliation, but Vivie rebukes her—recognizing that she must now go her own way and support herself by her own labor.

The roles that women play in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* show that Shaw was far ahead of his time in his thoughts about what women should do and be. In his work, he presented a new vision of an intellectual, commercial woman who challenged the conventional roles imposed by society. He also included accounts of women victimized by a

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\* For more information about this subject see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution#History>

capitalist society and defended their rights to take whatever actions they had to in order to change their circumstances even if that meant prostitution. In fact, Shaw's beliefs are consistent with modern-day feminism with only one exception. Shaw seemed to fear that a woman's freedom and choice of a career had to come at the expense of something else, namely love and family. Nonetheless, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is still revolutionary in comparison to the idealized Victorian understanding of women.

At the beginning of the play, when Mrs. Warren's profession is unknown to her daughter, Mrs. Warren is presented in the stage direction as a "formerly pretty" lady, "rather spoilt and domineering, and decidedly vulgar, but..." still "...genial and fairly presentable" (Act I, 34). The description of Mrs. Warren changes during the play though, and she is later referred to by Vivie as an "unmentionable woman" (Act III, 73) who can only be described with "two infamous words" (Act IV, 82), words that are not found in the play. When Mrs. Warren explains to her daughter about her profession and how she got into it, she argues that it was the best for her to do, she was poor and prostitution offered her money. This argument of hers, that she got into the profession because she was poor and had no prospects is one of Shaw's attempts to bring forward his opinion that prostitution is a result of poverty. Mrs. Warren also says that she does not think that it is right that prostitution is the best solution for a poor girl; she believes that poor women should have better opportunities of employment.

As far as prostitution is concerned, the criticism and all implications in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* are essentially directed towards one point that society should be blamed for this social phenomenon. In *Major Barbara*, Bernard Shaw argues that "Poverty is the worst of crimes. All the other crimes are virtues beside it." (Act III, 81) Perhaps the most obvious example of societal morals conflicting with individual need is the case of Mrs. Kitty Warren. Mrs. Warren is a female whose economic status and lack of any professional skills forced her into becoming a prostitute. Apparently, such a profession is against the values of the society that she lives in. Not only is she not ashamed of her work, she is proud of the amount of money that it, as well as administrating several brothels, has made for her. When asked of any shame about her job by her daughter she states, "Well of course dearie, it's only good manners to be ashamed of it: it's expected of a woman. Women have to pretend to feel a great deal that they don't feel." (Act II, 60) This statement shows that the only reason that one would be ashamed of it is because of society says that one should be. She feels that the restrictions and limitations that society has placed on women have made it impossible for her to follow any other lifestyle. She displays this by saying, "It's far better than any other employment open to [women]... It can't be right, Vivie, that there shouldn't be better opportunities for women." (Act II, 59) Shaw is trying to induce sympathy for the character of Mrs. Warren by pitting her against a society that is against her. He is quite obviously in favor of the actions that Mrs. Warren has taken, as demonstrated by the very reasonable rationalization for what she has done and the approving reaction of her daughter Vivie.



While it can be seen that Shaw approves of going against societal morals and conventions in the case of need, he is in the direct opposite attitude when it comes to continually doing it for only the purposes of greed. This is clearly exposed when it is discovered by Vivie that Mrs. Warren, while definitely having enough money to live on, still engages in the business of prostitution. Describing her reasons for continuing with her profession, Mrs. Warren says,

*But you dont know all that that means; youre too young. It means a new dress every day; it means theatres and balls every night; it means having the pick of all the gentlemen in Europe at your feet; it means a lovely house and plenty of servants; it means the choicest of eating and drinking; it means everything you like, everything you want, everything you can think of.*

(Act IV, 87)

These reasons obviously do not cause the sympathy that accompanied her reasons for starting her occupation in the first place. In fact they begin to cause feelings of disgust that someone would do that simply to get even more money than the fortune that they already have amassed. It is due to the disapproval of this continuation that Mrs. Warren is punished by not only losing the sympathy, but also gaining the anger of her daughter.

Another example of Shaw's disapproval for acting against societal morals and codes simply for the purposes of voracity is shown through the character of Frank Gardner. Frank's major objective throughout the play is to marry Vivie in order to gain part of the huge amount of money that is given to Vivie by her mother. Because he is simply doing it out of greed instead of necessity, Shaw does not create an aura of sympathy for him. He paints him as an annoying manipulative character that is constantly insulting his own father, a reverend, with comments such as, "You're not intellectual or artistic ; are you, pater." (Act II, 52) Throughout the play Vivie, again acting as the representative of Shaw's views, is constantly blowing off his attempts at winning her affection. Finally, he gives up his attempts when he realizes how her mother earns the money. He states, "I really can't bring myself to touch the old woman's money now." (Act IV, 83) Vivie is quite pleased to be rid of him.

In early January 1858 a letter signed by "One More Unfortunate" appeared in the *London Times*. The writer of the letter claimed to be a prostitute asking to be anonymous. The letter, published two years after Shaw's birth, is a letter of defence and an attack on hypocrisy. It very much looks like the speech of defence by Mrs. Warren in the play. By the eye of the public and society, prostitution was considered tremendously immoral. It is perhaps relevant to draw the similarities between the anonymous letter and Mrs. Warren's defence. The writer of the letter asks: "Now, what if I am a prostitute, what business has society to abuse me? Have I received any favours at the hands of society? If I am a hideous cancer in society, are not the causes of the disease to be sought in the rottenness of the

carcass?” (NA: 2006, 1594)\* The similarity between the two is in many aspects very high; the argumentation, the construction and the language. It is not as relevant whether or not Shaw might or might not have read this letter before writing *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*. What is relevant is that he gives the point of view of the prostitute. He makes a social problem the motive of his play without changing it, without embellishing or amplifying the awfulness of the situation. He simply gives it as it is. Mrs. Warren ridicules the hypocrisy of the society, as does the writer of the letter and she does it in the same manner.

Mrs. Warren reveals the circumstances in her past, which reflects an image of females at that time: her father is unknown to her; her mother called herself a widow and worked in a fried fish shop that supported the four daughters. Mrs. Warren had and still has a sister, called Liz, and two half sisters who were ugly and starved looking, but reputable and hardworking. One worked at a white lead factory twelve hours a day for nine shillings a week, the income of the “comfortable classes” was in 1875 about £ 15 a year, (NA: 2006, 103) until she died of lead poisoning. The other “respectable” half sister married a government labourer and took care of the household until her husband took to drink. This is the channel where Shaw is most clear; society does not pay virtue decently.

Mrs. Warren and her sister Liz followed another lane. The clergyman’s forecast that Lizzie would end up jumping off Waterloo Bridge was only true in part. Mrs. Warrens tells her daughter:

*I can tell you: she had more spirit. We both went to a church school—that was part of the ladylike airs we gave ourselves to be superior to the children that knew nothing and went nowhere—and we stayed there until Liz went out one night and never came back. I know the schoolmistress thought I’d soon follow her example; for the clergyman was always warning me that Lizzie’d end by jumping off Waterloo Bridge. Poor fool: that was all he knew about it!*

(Act II, 57-58)

The expression “Jump off the Waterloo Bridge”\* is used to summarize the faith of the “fallen women” meaning misery, prostitution and finally death. Working as a scullery maiden in a temperance restaurant, earning four shillings a week, Mrs. Warren is visited by her sister Lizzie who has been missing for some time. She is making herself a fortune in prostitution and the sisters enter a partnership. The similarity with the letter of the anonymous victim of prostitution discussed above is strongly present. Either way, whether

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\* Norton Anthology of English Literature.

\* **Waterloo Bridge:** a bridge across the Thames originally intended to be named Strand Bridge, but changed to commemorate Wellington’s victory over Napoleon in 1815. (Wikipedia)

in prostitution or working as a shop girl, the system is presented as an exploiter but Mrs. Warren is determined to make the best of the circumstances. She says,

*Yes, saving money. But where can a woman get the money to save in any other business? Could you save out of four shillings a week and keep yourself dressed as well? Not you. Of course, if youre a plain woman and cant earn anything more; or if you have a turn for music, or the stage, or newspaper-writing: thats different. But neither Liz nor I had any turn for such things at all: all we had was our appearance and our turn for pleasing men. Do you think we were such fools as to let other people trade in our good looks by employing us as shopgirls, or barmaids, or waitresses, when we could trade in them ourselves and get all the profits instead of starvation wages? Not likely. (Act II, 58)*

Here Shaw exhibits to his audience and his readers that prostitution comes from inadequate wages and inhuman working conditions, not evil people but a system that forces it. This probably caused many conservative and religious readers and viewers to burst out with rage. The Censorship could certainly not tolerate a prostitute that was not shameful and who was not morally distanced from in the play. Shaw leaves out almost all religious aspect. Traditionally prostitutes and fornicators were perhaps considered as too weak to resist the temptation of the devil. In Mrs. Warren there is no superstition or religious relation to the issue.

The play also strikes at the hypocrisy of the matter and particularly the aspect of marrying for money. In other words, Shaw believes that if the economical targets of marriage and prostitution are the same, then the marriage ceremony could not make any difference. Mrs. Warren is merciless:

*What is any respectable girl brought up to do but to catch some rich man's fancy and get the benefit of his money by marrying him?—as if a marriage ceremony could make any difference in the right or wrong of the thing! Oh, the hypocrisy of the world makes me sick! Liz and I had to work and save and calculate just like other people; elseways we should be as poor as any good-for-nothing drunken waster of a woman that thinks her luck will last for ever. [With great energy] I despise such people: theyve no character; and if theres a thing I hate in a woman, it's want of character.*

(Act II, 59)

This revelation has a great effect on Vivie whose contempt changes into admiration. The story makes her sentimental, filling Frank with contempt, and she cannot be recognized as the Vivie from before. She responds by saying,

*I am sure that if I had the courage I should spend the rest of my life in telling everybody – stamping and branding it into them until they all felt their part in its abomination as I feel mine. There is nothing I despise more than the wicked convention that protects these things by forbidding a woman to mention them. And yet I cant tell you. The two*

*infamous words that describe what my mother is are ringing in my ears and struggling on my tongue; but I can't utter them: the shame of them is too horrible for me.* (Act IV, 82)

It appears as if Vivie is not as much ashamed of her mother as she is of the society that she lives in and the system that runs it. In addition, she is bitter that she involuntarily for her entire life has been supported by it.

One may conclude that Shaw's opinions of society against the individual are clearly outlined in this play. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Shaw presents prostitution as a result of few economic opportunities for lower class women (rather than of hedonism, laziness, or depravity, as was commonly believed at the time this play was written) through the characters of Mrs. Warren and her daughter Vivie. Through the actions and words of Vivie, it can be clearly seen that he finds nothing wrong with breaking the rules and conventions placed on people by society, providing that it is for a good reason and not simply for self indulgence. Mrs. Warren finds in prostitution the only way she can avoid the greater indignities of poverty. She points out that success in prostitution, just like success in any other business, demands business ability and all the other traditional capitalist virtues. "I and I had to work and save and calculate just like other people; elseways we should be as poor as any good-for-nothing waster of a woman that thinks her luck will last forever." (Act II, 59) Mrs. Warren is also quick to point out to her daughter that in capitalist society marriage is merely a legal and respectable form of prostitution.

The conclusion could be drawn that Shaw feels that these morals are fine in a perfect society, but since we do not live in one they must be broken occasionally in order to attain a better life, providing that it is done only in moderation. To break or jump over all social restrictions, it needs a superwoman like Mrs. Warren who holds multiple traits. The strength of her character emerges from her thrift and good care of her daughter, and from her business sense. Her story of her difficult childhood and struggle to gain a comfortable life for herself and her daughter illustrates her endurance, and her lack of regard for social restraints reveals her courage. She is often domineering, however, expecting to control every situation she finds herself in. The reverend alludes to this quality when he admits that when he asked her to return his letters, she refused, insisting, "knowledge is power and I never sell power." (Act I, 42) Mrs. Warren can sometimes play the actress when she does not get what she wants. Her best role is that of a dutiful mother, which she trots out in front of Crofts when he expresses his intentions to marry Vivie and in front of Vivie when she shows no sympathetic understanding of her mother's choice of profession. Her love for her daughter becomes evident, though, in the pain she feels when Vivie rejects her.

When Sir George Crofts, Mrs. Warren's business partner, proposes to her daughter, Vivie, the latter indignantly refuses him because of his part in her mother's business. "My mother was a very poor woman who had no reasonable choice but to do as she did. You were a rich gentleman; and you did the same for the sake of 35 per cent." (Act

III, 72) Sir George answers by maintaining that most of the wealth in England is accumulated by subjecting human beings to conditions as brutalizing and degrading as those of Mrs. Warren's brothels.

*Do you remember your Crofts scholarship at Newnham? Well, that was founded by my brother the M.P. He gets his 22 per cent out of a factory with 600 girls in it, and not one of them getting wages enough to live on. How d'ye suppose they manage when they have no family to all back on? Ask your mother.* (Act III, 72)

The question that cannot be avoided is whether *Mrs. Warren's profession* possesses literary value and quality or if it is merely an expression of socio-political ideas. It has become evident during this study that Shaw does not have much interest in literature as inspiration, but social reality. It is his desire to change society by using an artistic expression that makes him write the play. By his own measure, he would probably consider the language of the play truthful and thereby beautiful. Nevertheless, the play contains some touches of Shaw's socio-political propaganda in disguise.

Shaw considered himself a revolutionary critic, blaming many of his colleagues of not having sufficient knowledge in social questions and moral issues. Shaw also claimed that he and his Anglo-Irish colleagues had a better understanding of the English behaviour. Due to their Irish roots, they had the perspective of the outsider. In 1893 George Bernard Shaw published his first play *Widowers' Houses* and said: "Nobody [...] will find it a beautiful or lovable work." (Greene: 1984, 19) When he is asked to tell the difference between himself and Oscar Wilde in their professional activity, Shaw said that his fellow Irish playwright was an artist and he himself simply a propagandist. (Greene: 1984, 3) But as Greene points out, it is rather unwise to take the distinction between Wilde as an artist and himself as merely a propagandist literally. The statement is probably intending to be more provocative and witty than it expresses Shaw's true belief but it strikes a crucial mark; that of the conflict in Shaw's writing between political ideas and theatrical and literary art. To clear all misunderstanding it is the social and political ideas that are contrasted against theatrical and literary method.

Shaw writes, "My method of getting a play across the footlights is like a revolver shooting: every line has a bullet in it and comes with an explosion." This is true since we feel the sincerity of these words when his plays are being fulfilled on stage. The surprise and our actual realization of his plays come at the end. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, when the curtain closes on Vivie Warren, alone in her office, however, we suddenly realize we have been tricked into watching a political drama. Shaw has educated, challenged and enlightened us in the midst of our laughter. This final perception shift is the quintessence of Shavianism.

### *Parents' Choices Affect Children's Destination*

In Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, the audience struggles to evaluate the opposing moral stances of Mrs. Warren, the mother, and her daughter Vivie. Mrs. Warren engages in illicit and dishonest activities, but does so to escape a life of extreme poverty and hardship and to provide a better life for her daughter. Shaw's point, therefore, is that the social circumstances forced upon women of Mrs. Warren's class allow no moral high road. Richard Farr Dietrich believes that *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is the best of the Unpleasant Plays, presenting two very powerful characters. In their conflict, Mrs. Warren and her daughter, Vivie, have the sort of intellectual scope and emotional force that one came to expect from Shaw by creating "a woman with a past" who was allowed to speak for herself rather than having words put into her mouth. Yet the triumph went unnoticed because the censor kept the play out of the theater. (Dietrich: 1989, 75) It seems Mrs. Warren took to prostitution as a young girl, becoming through perseverance, thrift, and the exercise of managerial skills the owner and operator of a successful and humanely run chain of European brothels, heavily invested in by respectable types. She feels that there is no need to retire as a businesswoman since prostitution becomes the universal condition in a capitalist system.

On the earnings of her dirty trade, she educates her daughter Vivie. But by giving her an education, she is building up the barrier between herself and her daughter. Therefore, the conflict between mother and daughter is inevitable. When Vivie is informed of the origin of her comfort and refinement, she is so shocked that she begins to hate her own mother. But is it Mrs. Warren's fault that she had to take up this infamous trade? The majority of men try to escape infamy as long as they can find honest means to earn their subsistence. Amidst such exploitation, it is impossible to earn a decent living by an honourable profession that they must fly to the extremity of evil.

Kitty Warren had to choose between noble starvation and ignoble prosperity, and she has chosen the latter. Her daughter cannot blame her for a thing to which she was forced. Vivie cannot help detesting her for her profession in spite of herself. It is an aesthetical aversion, as any honest man feels towards a scoundrel. Mrs. Warren who said, "I despise such people: they've no character; and if there's a thing I hate in a woman, it's want of character." (Act II, 59) Now Vivie finds herself her mother's daughter but precisely for that reason bound to break with her mother. "My work is not your work and my way not your way." (Act IV, 89) Whereupon the mother turns upon Vivie with a depth of passion such as had not been heard in British drama for two centuries. "I kept myself lonely for you. You've no right to turn on me now and refuse to do your duty as a daughter. ... I was a good mother and because I made my daughter a good woman she turns me out as if I was a leper." (Act IV, 90)

To the end of the play, the world of the two generations of women clash in the conflict between Mrs. Warren and her daughter Vivie. Throughout the play both women

articulate their strongly-held views on how best to conduct their lives in the circumstances they were born into, and in that debate lie the major themes of the play. Look at the following quotes from the play and examine the two different points of views.

*Mrs. Warren: Of course it's worthwhile to a poor girl, if she can resist temptation and is goodlooking and well conducted and sensible. It's far better than any other employment open to her.... the only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her.*

(Act 1, 59)

.....  
*Vivie: Everybody has some choice, mother...People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can find them, make them.*

(Act 11, 57)

The arguments, of course, are those of the respectable Victorian parent, a point Vivie does not miss, which ends the whole play:

*Vivie: Yes: it's better to choose your line and go through with it. If I had been you, mother, I might have done as you did; but I should not have lived one life and believed in another. You are a conventional woman at heart. That is why I am bidding you goodbye now. I am right, am I not?*

*Mrs Warren [taken aback] Right to throw away all my money!*

*Vivie. No: right to get rid of you? I should be a fool not to. Isn't that so?*

*Mrs Warren [sulkily] Oh well, yes, if you come to that, I suppose you are. But Lord help the world if everybody took to doing the right thing! And now I'd better go than stay where I'm not wanted. [She turns to the door].*

*Vivie [kindly] Wont you shake hands?*

*Mrs Warren [after looking at her fiercely for a moment with a savage impulse to strike her] No, thank you. Goodbye.*

*Vivie [matter-of-factly] Goodbye. (Act IV, 91)*

Vivie at the end of the play is not that Vivie we have seen in the beginning who is fascinated by her mother's character by saying, "My dear mother: you are a wonderful woman: you are stronger than all England." (Act II, 60)

In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, it is the "unhappy" ending that Shaw travesties: the boy does not get the girl; mother and child are parted; yet Vivie is happy. She refuses to accept the situation not out of an individualistic heroine's haughty disdain, not out of socialist confidence, but out of spontaneous imperative protest, out of the feeling of having

her own life to live. The events and discoveries of the play are her education, for which her career at Newnham was not even a preparation, and for the first of many times in Shawian drama the core and culmination of the play is a personal crisis, disillusionment, almost a conversion. A soul is born. (Bentley: 1947, 106) The premise of the play suggests that the wrong choice of the mother leads to a catastrophic parental relationship with the children.

Mrs. Warren's choice to be a prostitute to the end fundamentally affects her position as a mother. If Nora, in *A Doll's House*, has chosen to leave her children behind, the daughter in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* decides to leave the mother. The outcome is totally different from that of Ibsen's *Ghosts*. In the end, Vivie refuses to accept that her mother is still running her brothels even though financially it would not be necessary. Unlike Mrs. Alving, she does not accept being deceived by an unjust capitalistic system, social hypocrisy and deceit. In the end, having cut the bonds with her mother, she plunges into devoted work.

The play seemingly expresses a great amount of contempt for the pursuit of the personal happiness. Vivie rejects it, turning to the creativity in her work. Robert Whitman claims that Shaw did not like work for work's sake but that he worshiped creativity. To Shaw, happiness was self-centred, transient, sterile, and uncreative. By sending Vivie to the refuge of work, this seems to be Shaw's closing word.

### *The Socio-political Context Determines the Characters' Behaviour*

In *Pygmalion*, the premise and plot of the play are mainly built on the metamorphosis of a born and grown up in the lowest strata of society girl into a highly respectable Lady, in which the socio-political force plays a fundamental role. Shaw is searching for the 'perfect woman' in portraying Eliza Doolittle. Her dramatic behaviour is determined by specific social forces, which push her to change her social position.

Shaw, himself is politically a Fabian, or social evolutionist, a member of the Fabian Society. Unlike Marxism or communism, Fabians believe that it is needless to destroy society by revolution, but revolution could instead take the shape of social reform. Carrying this philosophical characteristic to his dramatic premise, and using Marxism as the interpretive socio-political premise in analysis of *Pygmalion*, Higgins first seeks to destroy Eliza, then recreate her in a more pleasing state, i.e. acceptable to society as a whole, for the good of society, rather than the elevation of the individual. This mirrors the societal and economic destruction/improvement process envisioned by Marxist theorists. This sequence of destruction and rebirth is represented in the theme, premise and the plot of *Pygmalion*. Shaw's own philosophic interpretations are displayed as the reactions of the various characters (representing differing philosophic viewpoints) to this process.

Before Eliza first encounters Mr. Higgins, she is simply a dirty, yet caring girl in the gutter of London. During her time with both Mr. Higgins and Colonel Pickering, Eliza does



change, for the first few weeks of her stay in Wimpole Street, she questions everything that Higgins asks her to do, and generally could not see how they would help her. Later, Eliza begins to understand that Higgins, as harsh as he is, is trying to do his best to teach her, and therefore should be respected by changing her social background. After the ambassador's ball, we see more of the old Eliza resurfacing. She starts to worry again, and since she has grown attached to Higgins and Pickering, she is devastated to see them finding her so trivial. Eliza's basic character remains relatively unchanged. We can still observe the old Eliza, under the upper-class persona. *Pygmalion* brings out the message that looks can be extremely deceiving, while touching on the issue that self presentation really does change the way people look at you. The synthesis of this unity of opposites within Eliza's character is not shown clearly in the play. There is a hint at the end of the play that Eliza finds herself; she becomes stronger than ever. She is changed by her interactions with Higgins. Now at the end of the play, she becomes overpowering to Higgins, her beauty becomes murderous as Higgins realizes that she is leaving. He is portrayed to the end as an ignorant fool, when even after all is said and done; he still hides his feelings mocking Eliza for wanting Freddie. Nonetheless, this conclusion may be regarded as a possible synthesis of Eliza's dialectical conflict in the play.

The end in *Pygmalion* echoes the one in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, with Nora slamming the door on Helmer. Like *A Doll's House*, *Pygmalion*, has no definite resolution. The play ends on an uncertain note. Whether or not Eliza will marry Higgins is left ambiguous. However, Shaw does provide a resolution in the epilogue in which he lists the reasons against such a union. Instead, Eliza marries Freddy Hill and the two end up running a fashionable green grocer shop. It is typical of Shaw who loves paradox to have provided such an anti-romantic conclusion to the play. The majority of the critics accuse Shaw of deliberately twisting the natural end of *Pygmalion* merely to make the play unromantic. However, critics who eagerly attribute this anti-romantic ending to Shaw's perversity would do well to remember that the actual point of the ending is not the issue of Eliza's marriage but her gaining independence.

A romantic union between Eliza and Higgins is impossible primarily because unlike her, he is incapable of transformation. He remains the confirmed bachelor that he has always been, an unsuitable Prince Charming denying either a fairy-tale ending to *Pygmalion* or a satisfactory marriage to its "Cinderella." For this reason, Shaw reverses the Cinderella story and disappoints the audience's expectation of a happy marriage between Higgins and Eliza, and the reconciliation of the other characters; by making Eliza refuse Higgins. Nowhere is Higgins shown more strongly to be incapable of change than in his response to Eliza's challenge to him. Eliza has thrown his slippers at him out of frustration with his lack of concern for her. "I'm nothing to you," she observes, "not so much as them slippers." (Act III, 75) Higgins instantly corrects her with "those slippers," a mechanical response which shows him clinging to the externals of his trade, incapable of recognizing the importance of the change, which has come over Eliza.

Such a reversal of happy ending of the Cinderella story on the level of dramatic techniques is accompanied, on the level of thought, by a reversal of the social conventions, beliefs, values and ideals. This is best shown in *Pygmalion* through the continuous contrast between the established order and the ideal order: Between the capitalist system imposed on society with all its hypercritical, exploiting and class nature, and the Shavian order in which society, people, morality, social manners are unified and seen as indivisible entities/realities.

Higgins's successful transformation of Eliza contradicts the class rigidity of Victorian and Edwardian society, demonstrating Shaw's belief in the highly subjective construction of social identities. To Shaw, the socio-political background of the individual determines his behaviour; this background can be improved by the individual himself. Drawing on a power Shaw calls the Life Force; human beings could both evolve fully of their capabilities and collectively turn to the task of transforming society. The Life Force is a tireless power which is continually driving onward and upward, growing from within itself into ever higher forms of organization, a power which is driving at a larger, higher, more intelligent, more comprehensive consciousness. To Shaw, social systems are changeable and need to change. As a Fabian, Shaw believes in human improvement and evolution as the key to social transformation. What Eliza learns by breaking free of Higgins's influence is an independence of thought Shaw believes is a crucial component of personal development.

When the socio-political context of Eliza and her father changes, by emancipating Eliza by education and her father by money, their behavior changes as well. After her development, Eliza has given up her former vulgarity and commonness and she has grown a typical petite bourgeoisie who is no longer fit for "gutter" jobs, and who judges the world wholly in relation to herself. As for Doolittle, he joins the middle class and is haunted with the care for respectability all the rest of his life. Yet, Eliza and Doolittle show disapproval of the change in their situation. Doolittle, in Act Five, comes to blame Higgins,

*It's making a gentleman of me that I object to. Who asked him to make a gentleman of me? I was happy. I was free. I touched pretty nigh everybody for money when I wanted it, same as I touched you, Enry Iggins. Now I am worried; tied neck and heels; and everybody touches me for money.*  
(Act V, 87)

In the same fashion, Eliza rebukes Higgins for having changed her: "Why didnt you leave me where you picked me out of? – in the gutter" (Act III, 75). She continues lamenting: "I sold flowers. I didnt sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you left me where you found me" (Act III, 77).

The difference between Vivie and her mother in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is deep-rooted to the point that any compromise between them is absolutely impossible. Therefore, she leaves her mother when she discovers her real profession. In the entire play Vivie is not once impressed by the materialistic beliefs of Mr. Crofts or Mrs. Warren. In the final

dialogue between Mrs. Warren and herself she expresses her point of view. "If I took your money and devoted the rest of my life to spending it fashionably, I might be as worthless and vicious as the silliest woman could possibly want to be." (Act IV, 89) Unlike her mother, Vivie does not believe in showing off and spending money, especially not if a person has not earned the money himself. Vivie disgusts Crofts' materialistic philosophy and now also criticizes society for accepting these types of people.

*When I think of the society that tolerates you, and the laws that protect you- when I think of how helpless nine out of ten young girls would be in the hands of you and my mother-the unmentionable women and her capitalist bully-.*  
(Act III, 73)

In addition to the dramatic techniques of metamorphosis and unity of opposites, Shaw uses another effective literary technique by writing colloquially, whereby he encapsulates the cockney accent in his writing. This is a common technique used in literature to create a vivid setting and atmosphere and helps to draw the reader into the writing. Because the social framework is what gives language its human and cultural reality, one of the goals of the drama and theater approach is to discuss the context in detail and use the language appropriately. In this case, the colloquial technique not only serves these purposes but also highlights the stark difference between Eliza's cockney accent and the 'upper class' accent that she eventually develops.

### *Revolution Leads to Solution*

With Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Shaw founded the Fabian Society, a socialist political organization dedicated to transforming Britain into a socialist state, not by revolution but by systematic progressive legislation, bolstered by persuasion and mass education. The Fabian society would later be instrumental in founding the London School of Economics and the Labour Party. In contrast to Karl Marx, the Fabians rejected the idea of social revolution, which plays such a decisive role in Marxist thought. Instead, they postulated a gradual reformation of society. In addition, the Marxist assumptions of a paradisiacal final state of society did not find their approval. Fabian socialism is pragmatic in character and focuses on the solution of contemporary social problems. For example, the Fabians demanded an equal income for all members of society, for, in their eyes, one of the greatest evils of contemporary society was an unjust distribution of wealth.

When Shaw in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (which may be understood as a radicalized sort of problem play) concentrates on the theme of prostitution, he takes up a literary tradition of the Victorian age. A woman with a past may be found, for example, in Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, or in Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, a play to which Shaw refers explicitly. But while Pinero is sharply condemning the immorality of his female protagonist, Shaw does away with traditional moral

interpretations and concentrates on the social implications of prostitution. To the convinced socialist Shaw, prostitution is no longer a sign of moral corruption but a social evil which is caused by poverty and material need. This means that prostitution for him is a symptom of the exploitation of people in a capitalist society, and not the individual but society itself is to be held guilty. This ideological attitude towards prostitution was regarded at Shaw's time as radical, revolutionary and insurgent. To quote Mrs. Warren,

*If people arrange the world that way for women, there is no good pretending it's arranged the other way. No: I never was a bit ashamed really. I consider I had a right to be proud of how we managed everything so respectably, and never had a word against us, and how the girls were so well taken care of. Some of them did very well: one of them married an ambassador.*

(Act II, 60)

Her attitude, therefore, is clearly different from the hypocritical pseudo-morality, which, according to Shaw, characterizes the theatre of his time. Like Ibsen, Shaw's understanding of revolution is no more than a kind of reformation achieved by constitutional means. These ideas of reformation may challenge the dominant social standards adopted by a given society. Consequently, opposition to Shaw's political ideas comes from conservatives, from Marxists, and from liberals. The conservatives dismiss Shaw as an ass or denounce him (1914-1918) as a traitor. (Bentley: 1947, xiii) The Marxists stamp him as a petit bourgeois mind. The British communist R. Palme Dutt once wrote of "the open and blatant counter-revolutionism of Shaw . . . distrust of the proletariat. . . the last pitiful bleat of the rentier or petit bourgeois faced with the conditions of capitalism which he cannot understand." (Dutt: 1928, 401) Nevertheless, Shaw uses the metamorphosis of the protagonist as a metaphor for the type of social revolution sought by the Fabian Society.

This type of metamorphosis is designed in *Major Barbara* in a way to reflect the socio-political revolution according to the Fabian style. It represents a gradual and intellectual transformation from idealism into realism, from the Salvation Army into Prevale St. Andrews, and from spiritualism into materialism. Bernard Shaw works according to his premise that any social revolution inevitably leads to a specific synthesis, which in turn represents the final solution. Therefore, Shaw deliberately offends capitalists, liberals and muscular Christians by choosing as his hero not just a capitalist, but the worst of all capitalists – Barbara's estranged father, the enormously wealthy arms manufacturer Andrew Undershaft, who shamelessly sells weapons to anyone who can pay and jeers at Christmas card moralities of peace on earth. He tells Stephen,

*Therefore your Christmas card moralities of peace on earth and goodwill among men are of no use to me. Your Christianity, which enjoins you to resist not evil, and to turn the other cheek, would make me a bankrupt. My morality – my religion – must have a place for cannons and torpedoes in it.*

(Act I, 25)

On the other side, Shaw establishes Barbara's character as a type who is constituted on pure idealism. He chooses these two opposing sides, idealism and realism, since the big abyss between them is so deep to jump over, but Major Barbara does. Therefore, her metamorphosis from idealism into realism seems very obvious and significant to the readers. The whole premise of the play works within this perception that tempering idealism with some reality and realism with some idealism is the acceptable synthesis. Pure idealists often do not accomplish anything, for their time is occupied with unrealistic dreams; pure realists are so concerned with the world as it exists that they cannot dream of a way to make things better. In the play, Barbara's idealism is tempered with reality without destroying her dreams. She finds a new, more realistic way to channel her energies into helping others.

Barbara and Undershaft are united by many things: paternal and filial relationship, society, family and law. Yet they are opposites. It is necessary for their individual characters that this unity should be broken, or that one of them should submit completely to the other—thus killing his individuality. "The unity between opposites must be so strong that the deadlock can be broken only if one of the adversaries or both are exhausted, beaten, or annihilated completely at the end." (Egri: 1946, 122) In a real unity of opposites, compromise is impossible. The only solution may be found in a synthesis, which is the final product of the dramatic conflict between thesis and anti-thesis. In *Major Barbara*, the synthesis is Cusins. Therefore, this unity of opposites between Barbara and her father helps her revolutionize her own thoughts and strategies in life.

Cusins, in turn, does figure his decision to join the Undershaft firm as a turn to life. He has sold his soul for reality and power, a reality and power attained through the exercise of his will on behalf of his beloved people. Through the munitions factories, he will abandon his anachronistic and intellectualizing studies and make power for the contemporary world, a power accessible to the masses and that forces the "intellectual oligarchy" (Act III, 88) to exert itself for the general good. Like Undershaft, Cusins comes to apotheosize the arm as the power that can destroy all others and determine the course of the world. It is, however, a radical metamorphosis from a university professor of Greek into a moralist-materialist.

Cusins, who represents the revolutionary synthesis of that unity of opposites of Barbara and Mr. Undershaft, pretends to be a Salvationist because of his love for Barbara, though he tells Andrew Undershaft that he has a genuine interest in religion. He shares some of Barbara's idealism and is revolted by Undershaft's cynical religion of money and gunpowder; in fact, he frequently calls Undershaft the devil or Mephistopheles. Yet he is also persuaded to some extent by Undershaft's arguments and agrees to succeed Undershaft in his armaments business. Nonetheless, he brings some of his own idealism to that business, initially telling Undershaft that he will sell arms only to whom he wishes, while Undershaft insists he sell to everyone. Finally, citing his own socially acceptable but morally questionable acts, he agrees to accept Undershaft's offer, but leaves the audience

with the impression that he and Barbara will try to do good through a business based on evil. Shaw's premise ends here that revolution in this sense of rejecting the pure materialism presented in Mr. Undershaft, leads to Cusins as a mixture of both Barbara's idealism and Undershaft's realism as the resolution of the play.

This Fabian socio-political revolution is easily achieved in the play since the dramatist moves his characters in the directions he likes and he has the freedom of mixing different colours regardless of painting rules to generate new ones. The whole matter in the dramatic work is painting with words within the individual's psyche and cultural context to produce dramatic action. Bernard Shaw portrays Cusins as the future Undershaft in *Major Barbara*; this eccentric and paradoxical mixture of morality and materialism cannot be achieved in reality. No one can imagine a political system, for instance, consists of both theological and materialist dogmas. They are two opposites united in one system and, in turn, they should uselessly tend to a synthesis since no compromise is possible between them. In this case, the dialectical conflict will re-start in this endless series of opposites and consequently no actual and tangible revolution occurs. This utopian point of view of revolution may be regarded as a point of weakness in Bernard Shaw's writings.

### *Class Difference and Struggle in Pygmalion* \*

Throughout most of civilization, people have been divided into social classes. In many different especially capitalist cultures, there is an upper class, which is rich, powerful, and the most authoritative one. In the nineteenth century England, the high aristocratic society distinguished itself from the rest of English society. It consisted of the elegantly dressed bourgeois class sharply contrasting the poor peasant class. Then there was a middle class, less comfortably off than the upper class, and definitely less powerful, but respected nonetheless. At the bottom there is the lower working class making up the majority of people, rarely having the requirements of life and never considered by other classes no matter how long or hard they worked on improving their circumstances.

*Pygmalion* illustrates the difference and tension between the upper and lower class in the Victorian period. A basic belief of the period was that a person is born into a class and that no one can move from one class to another. Shaw, on the contrary, believes that personality is not defined by birth. Instead, he thinks that man can achieve social change if he really believes in himself. As to the play, the barriers between classes are not natural and can be broken down. The play looks at middle class morality and upper-class superficiality, and reflects the social ills of nineteenth century England, and attests that all

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\* This section essentially aims at discussing whether George Bernard Shaw agreed with this social distinction and division of society and how he exhibited his views through his renowned play *Pygmalion*. The myth is artistically and technically used to show the readers the background and the source of the play.

people are worthy of respect and dignity. To achieve this purpose, Bernard Shaw brilliantly chooses the Greek myth of *Pygmalion and Galatea*.

In analyzing *Pygmalion*, one cannot fully evaluate the social criticism and conflict without understanding the play's background, characters and themes. The theme is based on the legend behind the play's title and Shaw's commentary on social status. Pygmalion, the mythical king of Cyprus, had many problems when dating women. He always seemed to accept dates from the wrong women. Some were vulgar, others were selfish; he was revolted by the faults nature had placed in these women. It left him feeling very disheartened. He eventually came to scorn the female gender so much that he decided he would never marry any maiden. For comfort and consolation, he turned to the arts, finding his talent in sculpture. Using exquisite skills, he carved a statue out of ivory that was so resplendent and delicate that no maiden could be compared with its beauty. This statue was the perfect resemblance of a living maiden. His art was so good that it caught him in his own web of deceit. Pygmalion fell in love with his creation and often laid his hand upon the ivory statue as if to reassure himself it was not living. He named the ivory maiden Galatea (/gælə'ti:ð/) and he caressed her, gave her presents and decorated her body with fine clothing and jewels. He even laid her on his royal bed at night to sleep, calling her his wife. At the festival of Aphrodite\*, which was celebrated with great relish throughout all of Cyprus, the lonely Pygmalion lamented his situation. When the time came for him to play his part in the processional, Pygmalion stood by the altar and meekly prayed: "If you gods can give all things, may I have as my wife, I pray..." (Ovid: 1998, X), he did not dare say "the ivory maiden" but instead said: "one like the ivory maiden." Aphrodite, who also attended the festival, heard his appeal and she knew that he meant he wanted his statue to be his wife, so she granted his wish. After the day's festivities, Pygmalion returned home and kissed Galatea, as was his custom. At the warmth of her kiss, he started as if stung by a hornet. The arms that were ivory now felt soft to his touch and when he softly pressed her neck, the veins throbbed with life. Humbly raising her eyes, the maiden saw Pygmalion and the light of day simultaneously. Aphrodite blessed the happiness and union of this couple with a child. Pygmalion and Galatea named the child Paphos, for which the city is known until this day. (Ovid: 1998, X)

In this Greek myth, Pygmalion creates an ideal woman, made out of ivory. Although he never expects her to become real, he still treats her like his wife and takes great care of her. Eventually his wish is granted and she is brought to life. The ideal woman, in his eyes, is now his wife. Pygmalion creates and forms this woman, showing that if man wants something bad enough and loves it as much as he loves his statue, he can make it happen. It is a metamorphose from stone into a human being, from a lower level to an upper level.

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\* Aphrodite (in Latin: Venus) is the classical Greek goddess of love, sex, and beauty.

This legend has many parallels with Shaw's play. Professor Higgins is an expert in his field, just as the sculptor Pygmalion was in his. Higgins also holds the same view of women demonstrating this when he says, "I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a nuisance." (Act II, 35) The final analogy is that both men turn uncarved stone into something beautiful using their talents. Unfortunately, Shaw does not allow the happy ending of the legend to occur in his play as sentimental people would hope. Rather after Higgins has molded her into his special creation, she develops her own defiant self that is totally independent from her creator. This illustrates Shaw's dislike of overdone romantic plays with unrealistic endings.

In Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Eliza Doolittle is a disheveled cockney flower seller\* who is lucky enough to catch the eye of a Professor Henry Higgins who gives her an offer she cannot refuse. Higgins is a well-known phonetic expert who studies "...the science of speech..." (Act I, 15), but he is awkward and rude in the area of social graces. This character is the direct protagonist of Eliza and yet the observer oftentimes can identify with him as well. Even his own mother comments undesirably when she says, "You offend all my friends: they stop coming whenever they meet you." (Act III, 52) His eccentricities and brusque attitude are almost presented as comical. He is very unconcerned about other's feelings and desires but that does not necessarily mean he is centered on himself. Rather he feels he is serving the human race at large and that not anyone in the way of that is worth his time. He brutally criticizes Eliza's hateful 'boo-hooing' and crude pronunciations of words. To the snobby, intolerant Higgins inarticulateness and ignorance concerning proper dialect and language produces a 'verbal class distinction' that functions as an external indicator of what class in society one may belong to. He tells his mother,

*But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul.*

(Act III, 64)

He cannot understand why some English men and women do not take the time to learn how to speak proper English.

Higgins makes the offer to Eliza to stay with him for six months and he would teach her how to speak articulately enough to pass in the most exclusive social gathering, the Embassy Ball, without anyone being aware of her Cockney origins, which is no small task. He says that she will become a proper aristocratic lady who speaks proper English. Once Eliza and Professor Higgins begin 'business,' they practice the skills and pronunciations of the proper use of English. Everyday they repeatedly practice Eliza's grammar, dialects,

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\* At the time that this play was written, the idea of female professionals was somewhat new. Aside from the profession of prostitution, women were generally housewives before this period, and there is some residual resistance to the idea of normally male professions being entered by females in the play.



and speech patterns with a recording device that enables Eliza to learn from her own mistakes. In just weeks, there are dramatic differences in Eliza's speech patterns that are apparent by listening to their recording lessons. Not only has her English improved, but her manners and etiquette have improved as well, due to the help of Professor Higgins.

Months later, Eliza has been transformed into 'one of them,' a member of the exclusive bourgeois class in England, able to 'pass' at any social event she chooses, which is no easy accomplishment. Thanks to Professor Higgins, Eliza can mingle with the 'snobs' of the elite class, and no one has any idea where she is originally from. Higgins has not only traversed the 'phonetic stream,' transforming one polar opposite dialect into another, but he has simultaneously developed affection for his star pupil. The six months have passed quickly, and it is time for Eliza to leave. Eliza is a fresh new woman, and is capable of playing off the aristocratic role, to live a sophisticated and proper life of her own. In fact, she wins the heart of a fine gentleman, Freddy, and is planning a marriage with him. Higgins is surprised, although he does not show it, and continues to act as if he is not bothered at all by this development. In his mind though, he is remembering how accustomed he has grown to her face, which he will soon miss. The two say their 'good-byes,' and Higgins returns home to find himself listening to the first recordings of Eliza. Shortly thereafter Eliza returns to Higgins home and surprises him with the truth of her true feelings for him. She finally admits to herself that she has grown to love both him and his lifestyle, and that Freddy is not her true love.

Professor Higgins has unknowingly 'molded' Eliza into his ideal woman, and although Pygmalion did not actually teach and transform his statue into his ideal woman, his undying hope for an ideal intellectual mate to suit the physical beauty he created brought together divine intervention with divine creation and formed his ideal woman, in his eyes. This is very obvious with Shaw; he often makes his characters start out in almost absolute spiritual and intellectual opposition to

*a figure possessing superhuman clarity of perception and strength of purpose, whom they never really understand, but who in a series of educational confrontations lifts them to higher levels of self-consciousness and realism in their awareness of the world around them.* (Whitman: 1977, 208)

Again, this is evidence that anything is possible, if man really devotes his mind to it. Although Professor Higgins is rude and snobby, he still holds a strong belief in his ideal and it takes a lot of devotion to take an unmolded human being and bring qualities out in her that no one ever thought such qualities were there. "He displays the power inherent in class status, money, and gender. Because he is upper class, wealthy, and male, Higgins believes he has complete control over Liza, which is why he cannot accept her rebellion at the close." (Abbotson: 2003, 31)

Eliza is the primary protagonist that arrests the audience's attention and sympathy. Her character is portrayed as diligent, hard working, and inherently intelligent. She is a young woman thrust out into the working world by her equally unwealthy father. Although Eliza's appearance and action are quite rough at the beginning, she does improve and allow her own natural beauty to shine through. This is evidenced when her father says after Higgins has taken her in, "I never thought she would clean up as good looking as that (Act II, 46). Apparently, Eliza impresses the other characters with her transformation.

Eliza's spirit is as much a part of her as her outward appearance. Instead of cowering under Higgins biting comments and fiery temper she matches his with one equally as caustic. Her intelligence also helps her survive in the world, both the aristocracy and the slums. She shows a true perseverance and loyalty to both her lessons and her teacher. Eliza most likely gains most of her emotional appeal by her unfailing innocence and thirst for knowledge.

The conflict of *Pygmalion* is the undertaking of teaching Eliza to rise in society. The motives held by each of the characters differ but the desired outcome is the same. This conflict is probably the most obvious humor in the play for two reasons. One, the audience can relate to the use of slang and improper English in their own speech causing Eliza's mistakes to be funny. Secondly, it is the use Eliza makes of her new found knowledge at Mrs. Higgins' house. While there, Eliza is trained to stick to two topics, that of health and the weather. Although Eliza has mastered perfect enunciation by this point her subject matter and word choice are not exactly refined.

The question is raised, what separates the classes really, if clothing and the way of speaking can do so much for how someone is perceived. Throughout the play, ladies and gentlemen are constantly recognized for who they are through different features such as how they are dressed, their manners, how they speak, morality or their money. It is however noticeable that a combination of all factors is rarely to be found. For instance, it has been seen that though Henry Higgins is well dressed, well spoken and with money, he has manners that could not be characterized as genteel. Alfred Doolittle (after acquiring some money) is well dressed, has some form of manners and could be classified as rich, yet he is not well spoken. Nevertheless, when the maid opens the door to him she immediately perceives that he is a gentleman.

The Parlor-Maid: *Mr. Henry, a gentleman wants to see you very particular. He's been sent on from Wimpole Street.*

Higgins: *Oh, bother! I can't see anyone now. Who is it?*

The Parlor-Maid: *A Mr. Doolittle, Sir.*

Pickering: *Doolittle! Do you mean the dustman?*

The Parlor-Maid: *Dustman! Oh no, sir: a gentleman.*

(Act V, 84-85)

Alfred Doolittle arrives at Wimpole St, in the second act, and does not even recognize his own daughter, Eliza, just because she has been washed and elegantly dressed.

Alfred: *Beg Pardon, miss.*

Eliza: *Garn! Don't you know your own daughter?*

Alfred: *Bly me! Its Eliza!* (Act II, 46)

This demonstrates that the working class was not used to washing and dressing up, which was customary for the upper class. The dissimilarity in the appearance of the upper class from the working class was so sensational that even someone who was your own flesh and blood could be naturally mistaken.

This trend of depicting appearances goes right through language as well. Language is a very important part of any society, whether it should be or not, is another question.\* Language is one of those appearance features through which one can judge or evaluate others. To Shaw, language as part of education is not a matter of appearance, “it is that the artist who adores mankind as his highest subject always comes back to the reality beneath the clothes.” (Shaw: 1986, 137) Language is a powerful thing; it can make you a duchess or a flower girl, a bum or a high society gentleman or at least appear to be. G. E. Brown says that the readers realize that Bernard Shaw “is trying to show in this play that it is only lack of education and opportunity that cause many of Elizas of this world to remain flower girls.” (Brown: 1970, 94) Eliza tells Mr. Pickering, trying to find an answer for the question of what distinguishes ladies and gentlemen from flower girls and dustmen, by saying,

*You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.*

(Act V, 83)

*Pygmalion* looks at the superficiality of upper class society, a society in which social status is determined by the language that one speaks, one's manners, and the clothes one wears. *Pygmalion* addresses the social ills in England at the turn of the century. Victorian England was characterized by extreme class division and limited social mobility. Language separated the elite from the lower class. In *Pygmalion*, Eliza's dialect inhibits her from procuring a job in a flower shop; *Pygmalion* is about the universal truth that all people are worthy of respect and dignity, from the wealthy nobleman to the beggar on the street corner. The difference between a common flower girl and a duchess, apart from

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\* In this play and in British society at large, language is closely tied with class. From a person's accent, one can determine where the person comes from and usually what the person's socioeconomic background is. Because accents are not very malleable, poor people are marked as poor for life. Higgins's teachings are somewhat radical in that they disrupt this social marker, allowing for greater social mobility.

appearance and demeanor, is the way she is treated. Treat the flower girl as if she were a duchess, worthy of respect and decency, and she will become a better person as a result.

*Pygmalion* also looks at middle class morality through the characterization of Mr. Doolittle, Eliza's father. The spiritual philosophy of Mr. Alfred Doolittle is one of the most remarkable yet comic beliefs presented in Shaw's drama. Due to Shaw's emphasis on social class as a prominent theme, it seems appropriate that the most profound statements come from the most surprising source. Shaw enjoys weaving his own personal convictions throughout all of his work vicariously and wittily, *Pygmalion* being no exception. Mr. Doolittle is a common dustman, a lethargic man who spends his time drinking alcohol at the local pub. He is not too proud to beg for money, even from Eliza. He is representative of the social class of the undeserving poor, which, means that he is not entitled to receive financial support from the government, since he is physically able to work.

Further on, in Act V, Mr. Doolittle appears at the house of Professor Higgins, and angrily accuses Higgins of making him into a middle-class gentleman against his will. "Done to me! Ruined me. Destroyed my happiness. Tied me up and delivered me into the hands of middle class morality." (Act V, 86) Doolittle maintains that he is looking out for his daughter when he is actually attempting to blackmail Professor Higgins. Moreover, he lives with a woman to whom he is not married. Mr. Higgins has said that Alfred Doolittle was the most original moralist in present day England. He has written a note to Mr. Wannafeller, a rich American and told him that. Wannafeller died and left Doolittle a share worth a thousand dollars a year on condition that he should lecture for his Wannafeller Moral reform World League possibly up to 6 times a year. Doolittle is forced into the middle class, and thus he must adhere to middle-class morality. This means he is expected go to church, marry his live-in girlfriend, give up alcohol, refrain from picking up women, and give money to his impecunious relatives. He feels now that extra responsibilities have been put on his shoulder. He could have turned down the offer but he was intimidated. As a result, he needs Higgins to teach him to speak proper English. He does not like it at all and blames Higgins for it.

Evidently, Doolittle feels that if he has only a small sum of money he is not required to be responsible for its investment, therefore making it possible for him to squander it on alcohol. Because he is not treated as the "deserving poor" who receive charity, he believes that he has no obligation to be wise with the small amount of money he does have. While some drunks or slothful impoverished people become bitter over this, Doolittle actually prefers this lifestyle as an excuse to be irresponsible and lazy.

Concerning the social distinction in the play, Higgins' social behavior and conduct with Eliza are revealed with aristocratic touches. He still looks at her as his "experiment". Higgins believes that how you treat someone is not important, as long as you treat everyone equally.

*The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for*

*all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.*  
(Act V, 98)

Higgins presents this theory to Eliza, in hope of justifying his treatment of her. This theory would be fine *IF* Higgins himself lived by it. Henry Higgins, however, lives by a variety of variations of this philosophy. It is easily seen how Higgins follows this theory. He is consistently rude towards Eliza, Mrs. Pearce, and his mother. His manner is the same to each of them, in accordance to his philosophy. The Higgins we see at the parties and in good times with Pickering is well mannered. This apparent discrepancy between Higgins' actions and beliefs may not exist, depending on the interpretation of this theory. There are two possible translations of Higgins' philosophy. It can be viewed as treating everyone the same all the time or treating everyone equally at a particular time. It is obvious that Higgins does not treat everyone equally all the time, as witnessed by his actions when he is in one of his states (as Mrs. Higgins' parlor maid calls it). (Act V, 83) The Higgins that we see in Mrs. Higgins' parlor is not the same Higgins we see at the parties. When in 'the state' Henry Higgins wanders aimlessly around the parlor, irrationally moving from chair to chair, highly unlike the calm Professor Higgins we see at the ball. Higgins does not believe that a person should have the same manner towards everyone all the time, but that a person should treat everyone equally at a given time (or in a certain situation). When he is in 'one of those states' his manner is the same towards everyone; he is equally rude and disrespectful to all. Yet when minding his manners, as he does at the parties, he can be a gentleman. If the second meaning of Higgins' theory, that he treats everyone equally at a particular time, is taken as his philosophy, there is one major flaw. Higgins never respects Eliza, no matter who is around.

Eliza confronts Higgins' social distinction towards her by telling him that, "He [Pickering] treats a flower girl as duchess." Higgins, replying to Eliza, "And I treat a duchess as a flower girl." (Act V, 97) In an attempt to justify this, Higgins adds, "The question is not whether I treat you rudely, but whether you ever heard me treat anyone else better." (Act V, 98) Eliza does not answer this question but the spectator knows that Higgins has treated others better than Eliza. At the parties, for example, Higgins is a gentleman to the hosts and other guest, but still treats Eliza as his experiment. Higgins could never see the 'new' modified Eliza. He only saw the dirty flower girl that had become his 'experiment.' Much like an author never sees a work as finished; Higgins could not view Eliza lady or duchess. Since Higgins knew where Eliza came from it was difficult for him to make her parts fit together as a masterpiece that he respected.

As Eliza becomes more cultured, Higgins uses more vulgar and more damaging language to all the other characters in the play. For instance, Eliza asks Higgins to call her Miss Doolittle as Colonel Pickering usually does,

Pickering: *Well, this is really very nice of you, Miss Doolittle.*

**Liza:** *I should like you to call me Eliza, now if you would.*

**Pickering:** *Thank you. Eliza, of course.*

**Liza:** *And I should like Professor Higgins to call me Miss Doolittle.*

**Higgins:** *I'll see you damned first.* (Act V, 94)

These outbursts are part of his nature and are presented to the spectators from the very beginning of the play. In his first process of teaching Eliza Higgins alternates between making fun of the poor girl and threatening her with a broomstick beating, which only causes her to howl and holler, upsetting Higgins' civilized company to a considerable degree. "Somebody is going to touch you, with a broomstick, if you don't stop snivelling. Sit down." (Act II, 25) In Act IV of the play, Higgins and Eliza are talking about how the bet was over and what their futures were going to be, now that his experiment was over. Higgins shows some of his lack of caring.

**Liza:** *[crushed by superior strength and weight] What's to become of me? What's to become of me?*

**Higgins:** *How the devil do I know what's to become of you? What does it matter what becomes of you?*

**Liza:** *You don't care. I know you don't care. You wouldn't care if I was dead. I'm nothing to you—not so much as them slippers.*

(Act IV, 75)

Eliza seems to be truly hurt by this remark. One finds this to be an extremely rude and viscous thing to say. Higgins is a grown man and he should have respect for other people's feelings, especially Eliza. His relationship with his mother is also a kind of awkward and unique at the same time. He treats her in different ways throughout his conversations with her. He acts like a little kid in some ways.

**Mrs. Higgins:** *Do you know what you would do if you really loved me, Henry?*

**Higgins:** *Oh bother! What? Marry, I suppose.*

**Mrs. Higgins:** *No. stop fidgeting and take your hands out of your pockets. [ With a gesture of despair, he obeys and sits down again] That's a good boy.*

(Act III, 53)

He likes to shock her with some of his mind games. He got quite a rise out of her in Act III when he was talking to her about Eliza.

**Mrs. Higgins:** *You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll.*

**Higgins:** *Playing! The hardest job I ever tackled: make no mistake about that, mother.* (Act III, 63)

So as it can be seen from Higgins' response, he has lost his high class manners and is much more shrewd and ill-tempered than what he seems, thus showing that a person of a high social class cannot always act as a person of a higher class should, or would, under normal circumstances.\* Nevertheless, Higgins and Eliza represent a stark difference in backgrounds and intelligence, but behave with a remarkable likeness. Eliza, in becoming such a person of high class, is disheartened by how Higgins still treats her poorly. He is locked into this mindset because of his social class, which is the basis of Shaw's criticism.

Shaw questions the defining criteria of what constitutes a gentleman through the character of Higgins. It is obvious that Higgins' manners are not much better than those of the Covent Garden flower girl.\* In fact Higgins comes off much worse because of the fact that he has had all the civilizing benefits of wealth and education yet he is rude to the point of being rough and ill-mannered, is given to frequent inflammatory outbursts, and possesses abominable table manners. The fact that such an ill-mannered person is accepted by society as a "gentleman" provides Shaw with an opportunity to expose the shallowness, triviality and hypocrisy of such a society. Shaw thus critiques a society that views wealth and the ability to speak correctly as the constitutive criteria of a prescriptive gentleman. As a result, Eliza is forced into the metamorphosis from a common flower girl into a lady.

Shaw uses the conflict between Eliza and Higgins to express his own thoughts on the diversity of people. He likes to set these characters on two different sides of a spectrum and develop how they relate. Although the play has a resolution, it is not exactly a storybook happy ending. Higgins and Eliza continue on their respective paths of complete opposites but not in the same way as before. Whereas previously, the thing separating them was social class, at the end of the drama, the largest gulf is primarily between their goals in life.

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\* To avoid any prejudice or misunderstanding, I would like to illuminate some facts about the British social hierarchy. The social hierarchy is an unavoidable reality in Britain, and it is interesting to watch it play out in the work of a socialist playwright. Shaw includes members of all social classes from the lowest (Liza) to the servant class (Mrs. Pearce) to the middle class (Doolittle after his inheritance) to the genteel poor (the Eynsford Hills) to the upper class (Pickering and the Higginses). The general sense is that class structures are rigid and should not be tampered with, so the example of Liza's class mobility is most shocking. The issue of language is tied up in class quite closely; the fact that Higgins is able to identify where people were born by their accents is telling. British class and identity are very much tied up in their land and their birthplace, so it becomes hard to be socially mobile if your accent marks you as coming from a certain location.

\* Good manners (or any manners at all) were mostly associated with the upper class at this time. Shaw's position on manners is somewhat unclear; as a socialist, one would think that he would have no time for them because they are a marker of class divisions. Yet, Higgins's pattern of treating everyone like dirt--while just as democratic as Pickering's of treating everyone like a duke or duchess--is less satisfactory than Pickering's. It is a poignant moment at the end of *Pygmalion* when Liza thanks Pickering for teaching her manners and pointedly comments that otherwise she would have had no way of learning them.

Higgins' intent is to better the world through himself, and Eliza's purpose is to better herself through the world.

In short, Eliza and Alfred Doolittle, originally living in bad conditions, represent the working class. What happens to Eliza and her father expresses Shaw's belief that people are able to improve their lives through their own efforts, but they have to consider that their character might change as well. Doolittle shows how difficult it can be to change one's whole personality. Once he becomes wealthy, he adapts to the conventions of the upper class and fears the lower class. Instead of this development, one should develop one's own personal, flexible code of behavior. It suggests that Bernard Shaw believes in the possibility of moving from one class to another after acquiring certain social aspects that allow man to merge in the new environment.

### *Socio-political Ethics in Major Barbara*

George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* has been called the most controversial of Shaw's dramatic works. The play was first produced at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1905, and early reviews were decidedly varied. Shaw's apparent criticism of Christianity and Christian establishments caused some to accuse him of blasphemy, while others defended what they saw as Shaw's realistic presentation of religion. Critics complained about the violence of the play, particularly in the second act, saying it was so excessive as to be beyond realism. Others disagreed, saying that the depiction of that violence, if unrealistic, was so only because the violence was subdued. Some politicians and capitalists regarded it as propaganda play to abuse the system childishly. Whatever the opinion of the critics, however, the play was a success with the public. It remained popular and enjoyed numerous revivals, including an adaptation to film in 1941. Today it is considered a very important work, not only among Shaw's plays but also in the history of modern drama.

*Major Barbara* is a panoramic incarnation of Shaw's ideas. It discusses a number of burning social and political problems. It throws light on Shaw's views on a number of subjects such as the religious organizations and their role as instruments of social corruption and as capitalistic means of exploitation and hypocrisy, the evil of poverty as a product of the oppression and tyranny of capitalism and its abolition, and the role and significance of power and money. Bernard Shaw emphasizes the idea that all social corruptions are just inevitable products of capitalism. Thus, one hardly understands Shaw's social ideas in isolation of his political ethics and vice versa.

The appeal of the play for many critics is that in *Major Barbara* Shaw deals with questions such as what should the world be like, who runs the governments and what principles should we live by? At the moment this world is in a huge state of examination and turmoil. It seems that *Major Barbara* has a direct relevance for what is going on today



and that the play in an exciting, witty and passionate way mirrors perfectly many contemporary issues and concerns such as the issues of globalization, weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biological and chemical), arms industry and trade, wars and starvation.

Mr. Andrew Undershaft's family consists of Lady Britomart, his wife, and a son, Stephen and two daughters, Barbara and Sarah. The audience learns that Sarah is engaged to Charles Lomax, who will not be able to support her until he receives his inheritance. It is also revealed that the other daughter, Barbara, who has joined the Salvation Army, is engaged to Adolphus Cusins, a Greek scholar who also has an insufficient income and who, Lady Britomart believes, only pretends to be a Salvationist because he is in love with Barbara. Stephen as well should soon seek a wife and will need to provide for his own family.

Lady Britomart has been separated from her husband, Mr. Undershaft, a wealthy businessman; he owns a munitions factory and has made huge profits by selling weapons of all kinds all over the world. Stephen is ashamed of his father's profession. The family is waiting for the coming of their absent father whom they did not see for along time. The main reasons for this meeting are to discuss the financial affairs of the family and to talk about the 'great Undershaft tradition' of inheritance. According to this 'great tradition', Stephen will not inherit his father's business because each heir to the Undershaft enterprise must be a foundling and must, when he dies, leave the business to another foundling. Lady Britomart tells his son that this is the main reason of their separation.

Mr. Andrew Undershaft soon appears on stage. He is an older gentleman with a patient, listening face that radiates great inner strength. He, however, is confused by the number of young people before him. In his initial awkwardness, he mistakes Cusins to be his son and his son to be a stranger. As all of them visit together, Undershaft shows the most interest in Barbara's work at the Salvation Army; previously a pauper, he had been part of the Salvation Army in his youth. There is a bargain between Barbara and her father. Barbara invites him to visit her at the Shelter at West Ham, where she works. In return, Mr. Undershaft asks her to come and visit his munitions factory. Barbara, hoping to convert her father, agrees to this arrangement, while he says that he may in fact convert her.

Act II opens the following day at Barbara's Salvation Army shelter. We see that the poor are coming here to eat the Army's standard meal of bread and milk. All admit to confessing sins that they never committed in order to satisfy the Salvationists, on whom they depend for help. Barbara exits, leaving Cusins to talk with Undershaft, who reveals that he considers money and gunpowder necessary to salvation, for without them, one cannot afford such niceties as honor, truth, and love. Cusins reveals that he has indeed become a Salvationist for love of Barbara, and the two men discover that their love for Barbara is what they have in common. Undershaft says he will convert Barbara to preaching his gospel and, to reach that end, will buy the Army, an organization that he

finds useful because it causes workers to be honest and happy, and thus less likely to form unions or become socialists.

Mrs. Baines, the Army Commissioner, enters, saying she has wonderful news. A Lord Saxmundham will give the Army five thousand pounds if five other men will each meet his donation. Undershaft reveals that this benefactor owns Bodger's Whiskey, a fact that does not dissuade Mrs. Baines, who asks Undershaft for five thousand as well. When Undershaft agrees, Barbara is incredulous that the Army will take his money or the money from Bodger's Whiskey; she believes that businesses such as her father's and the whiskey company are harmful to a humane, Christian society. Consequently, Barbara states that she will no longer work for the army. The play ends on a note of sardonic optimism. Undershaft's destruction of Barbara's faith is only a preliminary step; he must now convert her to his own doctrine.

Most of the events of scene III take part in Undershaft's factories and town, where Barbara stands as Cusins, Stephen, Sarah, and Lomax enter, each in turn exclaiming over the beauty of Perivale St. Andrews. Undershaft then enters, followed by Lady Britomart who, also praising the town, suggests the business be left, not to Stephen, but to Cusins and thus Barbara. When Undershaft responds that he must leave his factories to a foundling, Cusins reveals that his parents are related and that their marriage, while accepted in Australia, is not legal in Britain. Undershaft replies that Cusins can indeed succeed him. Cusins proceeds to bargain for a high salary, while Barbara comments that he is selling his soul. When she speaks of how her own beliefs have been shattered, Undershaft tells her she must seek a new religion that he saw only poverty and misery at her shelter, in contrast to the material comfort of his own workers, whom he has saved from the horror of poverty. Cusins tells Barbara he will accept Undershaft's offer, to which she replies that, if he had not, she would marry the man who would choose to succeed her father. Barbara has decided that she must have the town, that she must save the souls of those who cannot be bribed with bread or Heaven, that now she has found her work. When the others come out of the shed, Barbara asks her mother to help her choose one of her father's houses for herself and Cusins.

Bernard Shaw criticizes some religious and charitable establishments, like the Salvation Army. He makes the audience (and reader) question the real purpose of such institutions, especially the ones that strive to 'save the souls' of the poor. In the play, Shaw reveals how the Salvation Army takes impoverished people and makes them dream of heaven and spiritual matters, thus diverting their attention from their poverty. Instead of fighting for their rights, they are taught to pray to God for forgiveness. This, according to Shaw, prevents revolution or any kind of workers' struggle, as the converted people are no longer angry or dissatisfied with their conditions. At the same time, the rich industrialists continue to exploit them, making huge profits from their labor.

Barbara's initial focus is on doing the work of God. Act II gives the audience a chance to look at the practical implications of this work, as seen through the eyes of its

targeted beneficiaries. Through the conversation of Rummy Mitchens and Snobby Price, Shaw reveals that, while grateful for the material assistance the Army gives them, Mitchens and Price basically receive this assistance by lying. Both talk about the Salvation Army meetings in which they are expected to “testify” about their conversions. Price prides himself on convincing the Army of his former evil. He must lie and pretend that he used to treat his mother brutally so as to get some food and a shelter for two or three nights in the Salvation Army as a reward for his confession and conversion.

*Price:...I’m going to be Bronterre O’Brien Price, the converted painter. I know 3wot they like. I’ll tell them how I blasphemed and gambled and wopped my poor old mother –*

*Rummy (shocked): Used you to beat your mother?*

*Price: Not likely. She used to beat me. No matter: you come and listen to the converted painter, and you’ll hear how she was a pious woman that taught me prayers at ’er knee, an’ how I used to come home drunk and srag her out o’ bed be ’er snow-white ’airs, an’ I am into ’er with the poker.*

(Act II, 30)

Mitchens bemoans the unfairness to women; their confessions cannot be loudly proclaimed but “‘az to be whispered to one lady at a time.” (Act, II, 31) Therefore, the Salvation Army becomes an institution of teaching people how to lie instead of reforming them. The poor customers of the Army are obliged to lie otherwise they would not get any assistance, food or shelter. They come to the Salvation Army to save their souls; unfortunately, fact speaks differently that people come to save their life not their souls. That is why Shaw is against the church since it makes poverty, crime, and misery enduring. It extinguishes all revolt from the hearts of the poor. Such a state is abnormal because it makes these conditions everlasting.

Shaw was a Socialist, the hero, Andrew Undershaft, is a multimillionaire capitalist, a manufacturer of munitions. Pitted against him is his daughter Barbara, a major in the Salvation Army. She is upper-class, intelligent, modest and passionately devout. She has “escaped from the world into a paradise of enthusiasm and prayer and soul saving”. (Shaw: 1966, 88) Her father, Mr. Andrew Undershaft, is a convinced pagan who declares, “I am a Millionaire. That is my religion.” (Shaw: 1966, 47) Undershaft is the disciple of Shaw’s secular morality. Realizing that poverty breeds social discontent and thus constitutes a threat to capitalism, he uses his immense power to eliminate poverty, at least among his own workers. Barbara, he recognizes, to be a superior person possessed of true, but misguided moral energy, has deluded herself into thinking that the converts she wins through her work in the Salvation Army have been truly reformed, and the Army truly wins souls to the kingdom of God. Undershaft undertakes to convert her. However, Barbara extremely condemns her father’s profession.

Shaw did not attempt to examine all concepts of religion, but instead chose to examine two “classes” of ideas of religion — the spiritual approach vs. the material approach. Recall the biblical phrase that man cannot serve both God and mammon, Shaw believes that man cannot accept a spiritual salvation until he has first obtained sufficient money to permit himself to live comfortably. Thus, Shaw supposes that material salvation must precede spiritual salvation. The main conflict of the play is based on the technique of unity of opposites to expose the premise of poverty. The Salvation Army exploits the needs of the poor to convert them into Christianity; whereas Mr. Undershaft tries to make use of them by improving their miserable circumstances by working. Mr. Undershaft looks at life realistically and believes that poverty is a crime. He accepts that man must have money to take care of his basic human needs, and until those needs are met, man cannot have any intellectual or spiritual pursuits. He believes that poverty is,

*The worst of crimes. All the other crimes are virtues beside it: all the other dishonors are chivalry itself by comparison. Poverty blights whole cities; spreads horrible pestilences; strikes dead the very souls of all who come within sight, sound or smell of it. What you call crime is nothing: a murder here and a theft there, a blow now and a curse then: what do they matter? they are only the accidents and illnesses of life: there are not fifty genuine professional criminals in London. But there are millions of poor people, abject people, dirty people, ill fed, ill clothed people. They poison us morally and physically: they kill the happiness of society: they force us to do away with our own liberties and to organize unnatural cruelties for fear they should rise against us and drag us down into their abyss. Only fools fear crime: we all fear poverty. Pah! [turning on Barbara] you talk of your half-saved ruffian in West Ham: you accuse me of dragging his soul back to perdition. Well, bring him to me here; and I will drag his soul back again to salvation for you. Not by words and dreams; but by thirty-eight shillings a week, a sound house in a handsome street, and a permanent job. In three weeks he will have a fancy waistcoat; in three months a tall hat and a chapel sitting; before the end of the year he will shake hands with a duchess at a Primrose League meeting, and join the Conservative Party.*

(Act III, 81)

In contrast are the moralists and idealists, like Major Barbara, who seem to glorify poverty and suffering. They feel that if the poor are treated kindly and given charity, they can turn them into good people, saving their souls. Undershaft believes that such views are hypocritical, for he has lived a life of poverty and knows its pain. He says, “I was an east ender. I moralized and starved until one day I swore that I would be a full-fed free man at all costs – that nothing should stop me except a bullet, neither reason nor morals nor the lives of other men.” (Act III, 82) As a result, he makes certain that the workers in his factory are given a good life and rise above poverty. He knows that a hungry man cannot

think of lofty ideas or worry about his soul. He tells Barbara that “it is cheap work converting starving men with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread in the other.” (Act III, 82) “Religious people should work for the betterment of the one world they have and not turn from it for a vision of private bliss in the hereafter.” (Rolleyson: 2005, 844) At the beginning of the play, Major Barbara feels that she can save the souls of the hungry and needy who come to the Salvation Army; she idealistically accepts all of their teachings and tenets. During the course of the play, her father, Andrew Undershaft, makes her realize that her idealism must be tempered with reality.

Shaw attacked poverty at every occasion, from soapbox, platform, stage, and printed pages. In 1885, Shaw lashed out the vice and ugliness of poverty in his lecture, “Property and Slaves,” and warned that poverty is a destroyer of civilizations. (Shaw: 1961, 9) He says in another lecture, “The Crime of Poverty,” “there is nothing in the world I hate more than a poor man... [As a child] I thought them most horrible people. I simply detested them. I think such people ought not to exist.” (Shaw: 1961, 94) He hated poverty and wished to destroy it utterly. What appears at first to be a callous lack of fellow feeling for the poor turns out to be a passionate revulsion against the conditions which dehumanize them. For Shaw, poverty is obscene, ugly in itself and uglier in the inhumane and unjust gulf which it fixes between the wealthy and the impoverished. C. K. Chesterton observes, very accurately, early in Shaw’s career, that “he cares more for the Public Thing than for any private thing.” (Chesterton: 1909, 73) Shaw’s concern for the “public thing” largely determined his attitude toward poverty. Simply put, Shaw held that fully human beings can develop only in a just and humane society. Poverty, being patently unjust in modern society, poisons the social body and thereby aborts man’s still emerging humanity. Shaw’s conclusion is inescapable: poverty must be destroyed before it destroys, not only all hope for a just society, but mankind itself. Shaw proposes that the one immediate solution to the problem of poverty is for each individual to obtain wealth on whatever terms he can get – for wealth gives the means for obtaining health, education, security, culture, and whatever else goes into making a fully developed human being, and concomitantly, a genuine civilization.

Undershaft is also a stark contrast to Peter Shirley, who would rather starve than accept charity or earn money through dishonest means. He tells Mr. Undershaft, “who made your millions for you? Me and my like. What’s kep’ us poor? Keepin’ you rich. I wouldn’t have your conscience, not for all your income.” (Act III, 39) Mr. Undershaft replies, “I wouldn’t have your income, not for all your conscience, Mr. Shirley.” (Act III, 39) Andrew Undershaft genuinely believes that it is okay to make a fortune from making and selling guns and cannons, as long as the common worker is respected. He also believes it is better to be a thief than die as a pauper. In the final act of the play, Undershaft states the importance of courage and conviction to any cause; it takes honest, committed, and courageous people to make positive change in the world. He tells Barbara who accused him of being selfish and that his dogmas are nonsense,

*Not at all. I had the strongest scruples about poverty and starvation. Your moralists are quite unscrupulous about both: they make virtues of them. I had rather be a thief than a pauper. I had rather be a murderer than a slave. I don't want to be either; but if you force the alternative on me, then, by Heaven, I'll choose the braver and moral one. I hate poverty and slavery worse than any other crimes whatsoever.*

(Act III, 82)

Thus, Mr. Undershaft attacks the Christian belief that “blessed are the poor”, and dismisses it as a sham to keep the poor, poor and weak. In this original and “unashamed” way, Shaw is saying that the Church and the state should eliminate poverty as if it were a crime instead of praising it as a virtue. In this realistic and pragmatic manner, Shaw voices his beliefs through Undershaft who sees no romance in poverty and suffering. Undershaft determinedly states that only those who have never experienced poverty and suffering can see romance in it. He preaches that for improvement to come, we must “persecute” poverty and not idealize it:

*Leave it to the poor to pretend that poverty is a blessing: leave it to the coward to make a religion of his cowardice by preaching humility: we know better than that. We three must stand together above the common people: how else can we help their children to climb up beside us? Barbara must belong to us, not to the Salvation Army.*  
(Act II, 47)

The words “we three” belong to the trinity Shaw believes in: Undershaft, Cusins and Barbara. Undershaft represents the body of this socio-political system, Cusins represents the mind and Barbara represents the soul. It is a strange ideal mixture of intellectuality, materialism and spiritualism. The voice of mind is presented in Cusins when he tells Undershaft (the body):

*Mr. Undershaft: I am in many ways a weak, timid, ineffectual person; and my health is far from satisfactory. But whenever I feel that I must have anything, I get it, sooner or later. I feel that way about Barbara. I don't like marriage: I feel intensely afraid of it: and I don't know what I shall do with Barbara or what she will do with me. But I feel that I and nobody else must marry her.*  
(Act II, 45)

Shaw, the socialist, does not accept a pure materialistic system, which is represented by Mr. Undershaft. The ideal future system should be a combination of mind, body and soul to be accepted as an alternative to the present system. To Shaw, morals and materialism should go together as two parallel lines in any socio-political system. Any defect or deficiency in one of the constituents of this equation will inevitably lead to a catastrophe. Undershaft, the representative of pure materialism, is rejected by Shaw since

there is no place for morality and spiritual values in his materialistic dogmas. He makes Undershaft declare himself as a secularist, “My religion? Well, my dear, I am a Millionaire. That is my religion.” (Act II, 39) and when Cusins asks him whether he has any religion, he replies,

Undershaft: *Only that there are two things necessary to Salvation.*

Cusins (*Disappointed, but polite*): *Ah, the Church Catechism. Charles*

*Lomax also belongs to the Established Church.*

Undershaft: *The two things are –*

Cusins: *Baptism and –*

Undershaft: *No. money and gunpowder.\** (Act II, 43)

To Undershaft, money is very powerful. Undershaft tells Barbara that he saved her soul from the seven deadly sins: “Food, clothing, firing, rent, taxes, respectability, and children.” (Act II, 81) It is only because of Undershaft, who has provided for Barbara’s physical needs her entire life, that Barbara had the means to be able to seek and serve God. “Nothing can lift those seven millstones from Man’s neck but money; and the spirit can not soar until the millstones are lifted. I lifted them from your spirit. I enabled Barbara to become Major Barbara; and I saved her from the crime of poverty.” (Act II, 81) Undershaft preaches the gospel of materialism at almost any price. For him, the world is not in God’s power but in the power of the military industrialist. With money and gunpowder, Undershaft participates in the power that truly reigns over Europe, the power that determines the course of society. This re-organization of society-rather than one’s faith in a religious doctrine-provides the means of salvation. Consequently, man does not need redemption from sinfulness but from the material abjection of poverty, hunger, and sickness. Nonetheless, Barbara, the representative of spiritualism, does not understand this materialistic interpretation or justification. Obviously, this father and his daughter have contradictory opinions on the state of the economy. She sees that money is not the answer to everything. His argument is: I have given them money therefore, I have given them happiness. Her argument is: their souls are hungry because their bodies are full.

*Major Barbara* suggests then the failure of charity to solve the social problems and its absolute impossibility to cope with the question. Instead of helping to solve the problem, we go on breeding paupers and criminals from one generation to another. We purposely shut our eyes to the fact that the only possible solution of the question is to do away with poverty. That is why Shaw wants us to preach that poverty is a crime, the worst of crimes, because it is the originator of all evils.

Bernard Shaw cannot accept a pure religious system, which deals with the spiritual side only leaving the materialistic affairs aside. “Turning our backs on Bodger and

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\* The word “money” is repeated 55 times throughout the play.

Undershaft is turning our backs on life.” (Act III, 88) Therefore, Shaw regards the Salvation Army as a device to keep the poor suppressed since this institution has become part of the whole establishment and it has abandoned its true duty, which is to support a radical revolution against the existing capitalist order. After all the Salvation Army in the play is financed by the rich who are allowed to pay their “conscience money” and get their absolution. As Undershaft states, “all religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich”. (Act II, 47) Furthermore, this institution has become a symbol of hypocrisy. When Cusins and Barbara visit Mr. Undershaft’s factory at Perivale St. Andrews town, Cusins is overwhelmingly shocked, “Not a ray of hope. Everything perfect! Wonderful! real! It only needs a cathedral to be a heavenly city instead of a hellish one.” (Act III, 72) Unlike the shelter of the Salvation Army, Perivale Saint Andrews appears as a paradise of social engineering. Undershaft has redeemed his men more successfully than preaching ever could by eliminating poverty. He does not do so for the love of the masses. Certainly, Undershaft provides for their comfort to assure his company’s productivity. To Shaw, there should be a balance between the spiritual and the materialistic needs. A town like Perivale, which provides their workers with all luxuries is just a hellish place without moral touches.

The solution of this thesis and anti-thesis, Barbara and her father, is Cusins as a final synthesis. Cusins holds both spiritual and materialistic traits plus his wit; hence, he represents the ideal and future Undershaft. This is the socio- political system Shaw dreams of. It is a very vague vision, which may be applicable on paper but inapplicable in reality. Shaw does not tell us how to construct such a system in life, which consists of two contradictory ethics: morality and materialism. However, this future system will be controlled by wit and faith as Cusins assures this to Barbara and other characters by declaring that, “man must master that power first.” (Act III, 88)

Concerning the political argument in *Major Barbara*, Mr. Undershaft claims to serve his nation and provide work for people, but at the same time his products, arms, kill people and destroy civilization or impose colonial occupation. He admits to the destructive consequences of his business, but because he is just playing a part in the game of capitalism and playing according to its rules, he feels no guilt. Of course, any reality outside the logic and rules of capitalism to Undershaft is idealism and to be contemptuously dismissed as idealistic hypocrisy. He talks about the essential material and field of his trade by saying,

*The more destructive war becomes, the more fascinating we find it...but I am not ashamed of it. I am not one of those men who keep their morals and their business in water-tight compartments. All the spare money my trade rivals spend on hospitals, cathedrals, and other receptacles for conscience money, I devote to experiments and researches in improved methods of destroying life and property. I have always done so; and I always shall. Therefore your Christmas card moralities of peace on earth and goodwill among men are of no use to me.*  
(Act I, 25)



Undershaft's views include politics itself, which ultimately serves the arms industry of Undershaft - its needs and profits, not vice-versa. He is an extraordinary man, he is a cruel capitalist, but beneficent employer, a utopian who believes in humanity, yet also one who would sell the weapons to all parties and destroy them. He understands the conflict in the human condition, he has money and power, and therefore he is a potentially dangerous man, and certainly a formidable one. He blasts his son, lecturing him on the true nature of British Government,

*The government of your country! I am the government of your country: I, and Lazarus. Do you suppose that you and half a dozen amateurs like you, sitting in a row in that foolish gabble shop, can govern Undershaft and Lazarus? No, my friend: you will do what pays us. You will make war when it suits us, and keep peace when it doesn't...Be off with you, my boy, and play with your caucuses and leading articles and historic parties and great leaders and burning questions and the rest of your toys. I am going back to my counting house to pay the piper and call the tune.* (Act III, 67)

The Undershafts have the whip hand in capitalist society. The capitalistic interests use the power of their wealth to manipulate public opinion, through campaign advertisements and other kinds of propaganda, and thus control the voting patterns in democracies for their own benefit. To Undershaft, politicians are just toys that follow the orders of their masters. Undershaft's gospel is organized around the apotheosis of the millionaire and, more specifically, the military industrialist. As the characters will come to realize, the world is not in God's power but in the power of the military industrialist. With money and gunpowder, Undershaft participates in the power that reigns over Europe, the power that determines the course of society. Therefore he advises Cusins, "Choose money and gunpowder; for without enough of both you cannot afford the others." (Act II, 43) Under liberal democracy, neither the politicians, nor the people have the power; it is the capitalist giants, like Undershaft, who pull the strings, and they are above the law. To Undershaft, power is always the winner whether the rival is an ideology or any thing else as it is exemplified by the decision of the Professor of Greek, Cusins, to join Undershaft's side and succeed him in his foundling throne. Although he may at first appear to be making a pact with the devil, Cusins is actually choosing realism over romance, and practical improvement over impractical theories. Cusins has realized that he cannot change the world by teaching Greek philosophy, or even by preaching morality and so he takes to "gunpowder". After all, philosophy may be difficult for people to understand, but power is the universal language.

Undoubtedly, Shaw was against capitalism, but it seems that he was more against the status of being poor and unemployed. He argues that though the system of capitalism that predominates in his day is ill-structured, the best way to deal with the problems it causes is to work with it through its own logic. The best way to handle the poor is not to

keep them out of the system of capitalism by helping them remain unemployed, but instead to employ them and help them feed themselves. Shaw was essentially a revolutionary. He wanted to destroy the old order and the traditions and replace them by new ones. His plays were all aimed at bringing about social reforms. He wanted to convert his generation to his morals, ideas and outlook, and thereby, reform society. In *Major Barbara*, he has maintained this attack, although in a different manner. He used drama as a means of educating the ignorant public. *Major Barbara* is a sermon that is opposed to the lesson taught by Christian ethics.

### ***Arms and the Man: Love, War and Class Pretension***

The major themes of *Arms and the Man* are three – love, war and class pretension – and these themes have been welded into a single whole with great dramatic skill. The dramatist has shown how the romance of war leads to the romance of love within an environment of social pretension. Further, the dramatist's treatment of these three themes is characterized by realism. The contrast between realism and idealism is constantly stressed, and this results in a number of entertaining situations.

Once more, *Arms and the Man* illustrates the conflict between idealism and realism in a socio-political term. George Bernard Shaw wrote this play in 1893 during the Victorian era when most plays were lighter dramas or comedies in the vein of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which was a play about manners and other Victorian conventions. Still, in many ways, *Arms and the Man*, despite some of its themes, is a perfect example of Victorian literature. In his preface to the play, Shaw names his satiric target clearly. It is idealism and the romance, which Shaw thinks that they are one in the same. Idealism, he says,

*which is only a flattering name for romance in politics and morals, is as obnoxious to me as romance in ethics in ethics and religion... I can no longer be satisfied with fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct, shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cupidity and all other commonplaces of civilization which drive men to the theatre to make foolish pretences that such things are progress, science, morals, religion, patriotism, imperial supremacy, national greatness and all the other names the newspapers call them.*  
(Shaw: 1973, 12)

For Shaw, actions and beliefs invoking romance and ideals usually meant, in practice, something like self-delusion and hypocrisy leading to disaster.

The play opened to the British public in 1894 to mixed reviews and was one of the plays included in the *Plays Pleasant* Volume which included a few of Shaw's other, less popular works including *You Never Can Tell*. What is most interesting about *Arms and the Man* is that, although it is a comedy, it deals with several political and social themes

covertly. Ideas such as the idealism behind war and the romanticism of love are attacked through criticism and even more importantly, issues of class are brought to the forefront. Shaw was a keen socialist and had a number of beliefs about class that are appropriate to the historical situation in Europe. At the time the play was performed, Britain was experiencing a number of significant social and political changes as issues of class were coming to the forefront of national debates.

In *Arms and the Man*, Shaw artistically deals with a number of thought-provoking ideas and makes one think about these concerns after the laughter has faded. Unlike other plays of the time, *Arms and the Man* did not merely seek to entertain an audience with polite humor. Instead, it sought to expose some of the most pressing issues of the day in a palatable format—the comedy. This is a trademark feature of Shaw's plays and he once wrote, "What is the use of writing plays, what is the use of writing anything, if there is not a will which finally moulds chaos itself into a race of gods" (Peters: 1996, 109). In other words, George Bernard Shaw thought that there was no sense in writing something for mere entertainment, what he wrote had to serve a higher purpose and encourage people to think rather to sit and be content to be entertained.

Bernard Shaw employs irony in the title of his play, taking from the opening line of the epic poem "The Aeneid" written in 19 BC by the Roman poet Virgil -, "Of arms and the man I sing, who, forc'd by fate," (Virgil: 1998, Book I, 3)– in which Virgil glorifies war. Shaw's purpose in this play, however, is to attack the romantic idea of war. The original name of the play was "Alps and Balkans" because the story is based on an incident in the war between Bulgaria and Austria in 1885.

It is November 1885, during the Serbo-Bulgarian War, Raina Petkoff, a young romantic idealist Bulgarian woman and, is in her bedchamber when her mother, Catherine, enters and declares there has been a battle close by and that Raina's fiancé, Major Sergius Saranoff, was the hero of a cavalry charge. The women rejoice that Sergius has proven to be as heroic as they expected, but they soon turn to securing the house because of fighting in the streets. Nonetheless, a Serbian officer gains entry through Raina's shutters. Raina decides to hide him and she denies having seen anyone when she is questioned by a Russian officer who is hunting for a man seen climbing the water pipe to Raina's balcony. Raina covers well, and the Russian leaves without noticing the pistol on Raina's bed.

When Raina hands the gun to the Serbian after the Russian leaves, the Serbian admits that the gun is not loaded because he carries chocolates in his cartridge belt instead of ammunition. He explains that he is a Swiss mercenary fighting for the Serbs because it is his profession to be a soldier and the Serbian war was close by. He adds that old, experienced soldiers carry food while only the young soldiers carry weapons. Shocked by this attitude, Raina criticizes him for being a poor soldier. He counters by describing what makes a real fool, not knowing that his version of the day's cavalry charge makes fun of her betrothed. She is incensed but agrees to let him stay once he impresses upon her the

danger of going back out into the street. She tries to impress him with her family's wealth and position, saying that they have the nobility to give refuge to an enemy. He pledges her safety and advises her to tell her mother about his presence, to keep matters proper. While she is gone, he falls into a deep sleep on her bed and he cannot be roused by a shocked Catherine. Raina takes pity on him and asks that they let him sleep.

On March 6, 1886, Raina's father, Major Paul Petkoff, comes home and announces the end of the war. Catherine is upset that the Serbians have agreed to a peace treaty, believing that her side should have a glorious victory. Major Sergius Saranoff arrives just after Petkoff makes comments indicating that Saranoff is not a talented military leader. Catherine praises Saranoff, but he announces that he is resigning from the army. Raina joins the conversation just before the discussion turns to a Swiss officer who bested the men in a horse trade and who had been, according to a friend's story, rescued by two Bulgarian ladies after a battle. Catherine and Raina pretend to be shocked by such unpatriotic behavior.

Catherine and Major Petkoff leave the two young people to have some time alone. Raina and Sergius exchange all the silly clichés expected of lovers about how much they missed each other and how they worship each other. However, while Raina is away to get her hat for a walk, Sergius flirts with the maid, Louka, whom he has apparently chased in the past. Louka protests his behavior and reveals that there is someone for whom Raina has real feelings, not the fake ones she puts on for Sergius. Sergius becomes angry and insults Louka, although he is confused about his own feelings. He goes to help Petkoff with some final military business. In his absence, Catherine tells Raina that Petkoff has asked for the coat they gave the enemy soldier when he left. Just then, the Swiss officer, Captain Bluntschli, arrives to return the coat. The women try but fail to hurry him away before Petkoff and Sergius see him. Bluntschli offers to help them with the logistics of their troop movements, and Petkoff invites him to stay, much to the discomfort of the ladies.

When Saranoff and Petkoff go out to deliver orders to the couriers, Raina has a chance to talk with Bluntschli alone, and she lets him know that his story about his evening in her room made it through camp rumors all the way to her father and her fiancé. After bantering about honor and lies, Raina reveals that she had slipped her portrait and a note into her father's old coat when she gave it to Bluntschli. Unfortunately, Bluntschli never discovered it, and they realize that it could still be in the pocket. A messenger arrives with telegrams that tell Bluntschli that his father has died and that he must attend to the family business. Saranoff challenges Bluntschli to a duel, but when Raina charges that she saw Saranoff with Louka, he backs off. Raina then stirs Saranoff's emotions by telling him that Louka is engaged to Nicola.

Petkoff enters, complaining that his coat had to be repaired. When Raina helps Petkoff put on the coat, she pulls the incriminating photo from the pocket and tosses it to Bluntschli, not knowing that her father has already seen the photo. When Petkoff does not find the photo in his pocket, the questioning begins about the photo's inscription to a

“Chocolate Cream Soldier,” and an avalanche of truthful revelations from all parties begins. Nicola wisely denies being engaged to Louka so she can marry Saranoff. As Catherine protests the dishonor to Raina, Louka injects that Raina would not have married Saranoff anyway because of Bluntschli. The Swiss captain is hesitant to declare himself in love until he learns that Raina is twenty-three years old, and is not the teenager he thought she was. Confident then that she is old enough to know her feelings, Bluntschli asks for Raina’s hand in marriage. Again, Catherine protests because she thinks Bluntschli cannot provide for her daughter appropriately, so he tells them of his great wealth. Raina puts up a token protest about being sold to the highest bidder, but Bluntschli reminds her that she fell in love with him before she knew he had any rank or money. She capitulates, and the play ends with everyone happy.

### *Romanticism of War and Love*

One of the main traits that differentiate realists from idealists is that realists only concern themselves with practical issues rather than those that are imaginary. They attempt to see things the way they really are and have the tendency to face facts. Idealists have thoughts or behaviors based on concepts of things, as they should be. They try to see things the way they would want them to be. Bernard Shaw defines the idealist as a man “who has taken refuge with ideals because he hates himself and is ashamed of himself, thinks that all this is so much the better.” (Shaw: 1986, 53) To Shaw, the realist is the man “who has come to have a deep respect for himself and faith in the validity of his own will, thinks it so much the worse.” (Shaw: 1986, 53) He continues his argument concerning the idealists and the realists saying,

*To the one, human nature, naturally corrupt, is held back from ruinous excesses only by self-denying conformity to the ideals. To the other these ideals are only swaddling clothes which man has outgrown, and which insufferably impede his movements. No wonder the two cannot agree. The idealist says, ‘Realism means egotism; and egotism means depravity.’ The realist declares that when a man abnegates the will to live and be free in a world of the living and free, seeking only to conform to ideals for the sake of being, not himself, ‘a good man’, then he is morally dead and rotten, and must be left unheeded to abide his resurrection, if that by good luck arrive before his bodily death. Unfortunately, this is the sort of speech that nobody but a realist understands.*

(Shaw: 1986, 53)

Shaw implies that man should follow the example of the man with the abnormally normal sight, to whom evolution has given the power to see things correctly and realistically.

For centuries, valiance in war was considered one of the greatest distinctions that a man can attain. People were convinced that soldiers go in a war obsessed with sense of

patriotism and heroism. (Griffith: 1995, 230) However, Shaw unfolds with cruel nature of war. Indeed, in every line, the playwright ridicules the romantic concepts about war that praise this horrible trade. Shaw chose to set his place in the midst of a foreign war, in part so that he could offer some commentary about war. His purpose in this play is to attack the romantic notion of war and love by presenting a more realistic depiction of war, devoid of the idea that such death and destruction are both noble and romantic. These deconstructions make *Arms and the Man* a satirical comedy about those who would glorify the horrors of war and romanticism of love. However, Shaw was dedicated throughout his life to curbing violence especially that of wars, and *Arms and the Man* was one of the vehicles he used to plead his case.

In this anti-romantic comedy, Raina and Sergius are together for all the wrong reasons: because their social status requires a mate from the same social level; and because Sergius plays the role of the heroic type Raina has always been taught to admire, and she plays the role that Sergius expects from a woman of her status. However, neither of them is showing his/her real self, and their affection is based on outward appearances, but not on the true person beneath the facade. They are both playing the game of romance according to their idealized standards for courtship rather than according to their inner feelings. Raina has fallen in love with her courageous army officer who is so handsome in his uniform. Forced by Bluntschli and Louka to examine their true feelings, Raina and Sergius find out that they have the courage and desire to follow their hearts instead of trying to meet social expectations. They both must face the fact that their ideals about love are false. Luckily, Raina and Sergius are actually liberated by this knowledge to seek their true loves. Several instances in the play establish the character's ideals.

As the play opens, we are introduced to Raina, a pretty, young lady with her head full of romantic views of love and war, result of her reading Byron and Pushkin. She, much like English audiences of the time, is sucked into the idea of the war hero and finds it difficult to think that war is nothing except glamorous. The notion of war is turned upside down and the reader is forced to confront them just as British playgoers of the time would eventually have to face these issues when the First World War finally came around over a decade later. At this time war was still a vague enough notion that it could be romanticized and this is part of the criticism George Bernard Shaw offers in this play. Raina stands on the balcony of her bedroom admiring the beauty of her betrothed, Sergius, who is out on the front fighting the Serbs. Soon her mother enters the room to inform her that Sergius has become the hero of the hour because of his splendid victory in the battle of Slivnitza. He made a heroic cavalry charge on the artillery of the Serbs and put them to flight. He did so on his own initiative ignoring the orders of his Russian commander.

*You cant guess how splendid it is. A cavalry! think of that! He defied our Russian commanders – acted without orders – led a charge on his own responsibility – headed it himself – was the first man to sweep through their guns. Cant you see it, Raina: our gallant splendid*

*Bulgarians with their swords and eyes flashing, thundering down like an avalanche and scattering the wretched Serbs and their dandified Austrian officers like chaff. And you! you kept Sergius waiting a year before you would be betrothed to him. Oh, if you have a drop of Bulgarian blood in your veins, you will worship him when he comes back.*  
(Act I, 16-17)

Raina is in ecstasy, she feels that she has been a “prosaic little coward”, in her doubts about the heroism of Sergius, and that she is unworthy of him. Sergius’ reported heroism in war feeds her romantic love of him. She is full of idealistic notions of love and war. She confesses to her mother,

*It came into my head just as he [Sergius] was holding me in his arms and looking into my eyes, that perhaps we only had our heroic ideas because we are so fond of reading Byron and Pushkin, and because we were so delighted with the opera that season at Bucharest. Real life is so seldom like that.*

(Act I, 17)

This ironic speech prepares the audience for her later self-discoveries in the play. Likewise, at the end of the play as Sergius and Raina’s love is faltering we see Sergius’ lack of comprehending a life without romanticism in his confession to Raina, “Raina: our romance is shattered. Life’s a farce” (Act III, 74).

However, her romantic notions of war and soldiering receive a rude shock with the arrival of the fugitive Bluntschli. He is blunt in everything he says, blunt as is suggested by his name itself. First, she is told the truth about Sergius cavalry charge. It was something foolish and rash and Sergius ought to be court martial led for it. He and his regiment nearly committed suicide, only the pistol missed fire. He describes Sergius the leader of the cavalry charge sarcastically, not knowing that he was Raina’s lover.

*He did it like an operatic tenor. A regular handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and lovely moustache, shouting his war-cry and changing like Don Quixote at the windmills. We did laugh...but when the sergeant ran up as white as a sheet, and told us theyd sent us the wrong ammunition, and that we couldnt fire a round for the next ten minutes, we laughed at the other side of our mouths... And I hadnt even a revolver cartridge: only chocolate. We’d no bayonets: nothing...And there was Don Quixote flourishing like a drum major, thinking he’d done the cleverest thing ever known, whereas he ought to be courtmartialled for it...He and his regiment simply committed suicide; only the pistol missed fire: that’s all.*

(Act I, 27-28)

Thus, Raina’s heroic ideals of war receive an awful and dreadful jolt. Further, we are told that it is the duty of a soldier to live as long as he can, and that he must run away to save his life. He bluntly tells her that all soldiers are afraid to die, and further that it is their duty to live as long as they can. The conclusion is that most soldiers are born fools, and

they are all cowards at heart. Bluntschli himself runs away and enters the bedroom of Raina to save his life. This revelation is regarded as an earthquake that shakes all Raina's ethics of war.

Additionally, an underlying conflict is seen between romanticism or idealism and realism within other characters. The two men that come into Raina's life, Sergius and Bluntschli are representations of this conflict. Sergius depicts the passionate, impulsive, romantic war hero, while Bluntschli characterizes the practical, strong-minded professional soldier. The only static character is Bluntschli as he represents what the rest of the characters will attain by the end of the play: realism. Sergius represents the romantic ideal that the society of the time agreed with. He is an officer in the Bulgarian army and on the victorious side of the battle. Since Bluntschli is a soldier in the enemy regiment, he represents the opposing idea of 'realism'. Raina struggles with her inappropriate fascination with realistic Bluntschli when the "sensible" choice is obviously Sergius. As her experiences within the play lead her away from simplicity, she chooses Bluntschli against the Bulgarian society. Since Raina has never experienced a man such as Bluntschli, she is amazed at his behavior toward her:

*Raina: Do you know, you are the first man who did not take me seriously?*

*Bluntschli: You mean, don't you, that I am the first man that has ever taken you quite seriously?*

*Raina: Yes: I suppose I do mean that. How strange it is to be talked to in such a way!* (Act III, 63)

The attraction between Bluntschli and Raina therefore exists as a romance built upon Bluntschli's realistic manner, as opposed to Sergius' dashing heroic behaviors and impulses. In the setting of late 1800's Bulgarian society, Raina is the epitome of the hypocritical romantic figure, "Oh, to think that it was all true!... that the world is really a glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance! What happiness! What unspeakable fulfillment" (Act I, 17-18)! The romanticism she believes in is not real; indeed, it is an appealing facade. What develops between Raina and Bluntschli is a romance based on realism, not idealism. Raina loses her facade in the third act while talking to Bluntschli:

*Raina: You know, I've always gone on like that.*

*Bluntschli: You mean the-?*

*Raina: I mean the noble attitude and the thrilling voice. [They laugh together]. I did it when I was a tiny child to my nurse. She believed in it. I do it before my parents. They believe in it. I do it before Sergius. He believes in it ... I suppose, now you've found me out, you despise me.*

*Bluntschli: No my dear young lady ... I'm your infatuated admirer.*  
(Act III, 63-64)



Both Major Sergius Seranoff and Raina see war as a grand spectacle and an opportunity to perform heroic deeds; whereas Bluntschli has more realistic view of war. At the center of the play is Shaw's attack on the false ideals of warfare and the soldier's profession, which were prevalent in the nineteenth century. British society, especially the upper classes, tended to see war as a noble pursuit and the men who engaged in it as courageous heroes, eager to die for their country. (Rollyson: 2005, 839) Plays of the time that dealt with military themes usually upheld such idealistic views and were filled with brave and virtuous soldiers who feared nothing in their mission to conquer the enemy. Nevertheless, Shaw rightly understood that this was mostly a civilian viewpoint, and not how soldiers generally saw themselves. He exposes this contrast in the opposition between Sergius and Bluntschli. Sergius is the Byronic idealized soldier, his inexperience making him oblivious to the true nature of war. He is full of grand gestures his own army cannot even allow. By contrast, Bluntschli is the practical career soldier, who is more interested in survival than winning, who follows the rules and fully understands the potential horrors of war. But the romantic ideal of war as a glorious opportunity for a man to display courage and honor is dispelled when Sergius admits that his heroic cavalry charge that won the battle was the wrong thing to do. His notable action does not get him his promotion and Sergius learns that "Soldiering, my dear madam, is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak." (Act II, 42)

He knows that he is a different person with Raina than he is with Louka, and Louka has pointed out his hypocritical behaviors to him. Sergius realizes that there must be more to himself than the idealized soldier the young ladies worship, but of the other selves that he has observed in himself he says, "One of them is a hero, another a buffoon, another a humbug, another perhaps a bit of a blackguard...And one, at least, is a coward: jealous, like all cowards." (Act II, 48) He is flustered by the feeling that "everything I think is mocked by everything I do...Coward! liar! fool! Shall I kill myself like a man, or live and pretend to laugh at myself?" (Act III, 71) In losing Raina and declaring his love for Louka, Sergius is freed to be himself and to discover his own values.

By the end of the play, Raina understands that a man like Bluntschli is more of a real hero than Sergius. The audience also discovers that Bluntschli's practical nature is not without romance because he has come back to see Raina rather than sending the coat back by a messenger. Sergius asks him,

*Excuse me, Bluntschli: what did you say had spoiled your chances in life?*

*Bluntschli: [promptly] An incurably romantic disposition. I ran away from home twice when I was a boy. I went into the army instead of into my father's business. I climbed the balcony of this house when a man of sense would have dived into the nearest cellar. I came sneaking back here to have another look at the young lady when any*

*other man of my age would have sent the coat back -*  
(Act III, 82)

Together, Raina, Bluntschli, and Sergius attain a new realism that sees love and heroism as they really should be, according to Shaw. Thus, Shaw does not reject romance and heroism, but rather brings his characters to an understanding of a higher definition of these values. That is, the course of the play has worked to maneuver the characters and the audience into a new position and thus redefine romance and heroism according to the light of realism.

The main synthesis the readers may conclude that one of the chief objections to war is that it is idealized, made romance of. That is where the danger for humanity lies: we direct our ideas and will in the wrong way. Nevertheless, every clever commander very well knows that it is quite necessary in the army to idealize war and make romance of 'valor' shown on the battlefield. In short, crude romanticism is essential for the military caste. Logically, quite a rational and clever army would not fight for the interests of the Undershafts and Lazaruses. That is why war and the actions on the battlefield must be glorified, why crime must be idealized by the military caste.

### *Class Pretension*

At the time George Bernard Shaw wrote the *Arms and the Man* there were a number of class struggles taking place in Britain as a new wave of socialist ideology. Up until this point, workers in Britain were often paid low wages and offered little security as their country became even further industrialized. In response, there were several workers' movements that rose up across the nation and this drew the attention of artists and writers such as Shaw. Issues of class struggle were coming to the forefront of both political and debates in Europe and Shaw began working with the socialist cause. His feelings that the British workers were not advocating their interests enough and that the political structure in England was making it impossible for them to have any success led him to speak out publicly, often at the risk of some of his personal friendships. In addition to writing plays, Shaw became a full-time advocate of socialism and joined the Fabian Society where he wrote a number of socialist documents. He also traveled to Russia, met with Stalin, and came home to declare how wonderfully he believed socialism was going in that country. This socio-political climate is dramatically reflected in *Arms and the Man* as far as the theme of class pretension is concerned.

As a socialist, Shaw believed in the equality of all people and he despised discrimination based on gender or social class. These beliefs are evident in the relationships portrayed in *Arms and the Man*. Shaw allows a maid to succeed in her ambitions to better herself by marrying Sergius, an officer and a gentleman. Sergius is secretly seeing Louka, but he is forbidden to do it because not only he is Raina's fiancé but also because they are

of different social class, which matters a lot at the time the play takes place. This match also means that Sergius has developed the courage to free himself from the expectations of his class and instead marry the woman he loves. The silliness of Catherine's character, Raina's mother, is used to show the illogical nature of class snobbery, as she clearly makes divisions between her family and the servants, even though, or perhaps because, the Petkoffs themselves have only recently climbed the social ladder. The play also attacks divisions of rank, as Captain Bluntschli has leadership abilities that the superior-ranking officers, Majors Petkoff and Saranoff, do not have, illustrating the fact that ability has little to do with rank. Ability also has little to do with class, as exemplified by the character of Nicola, who is declared the ablest, and certainly the wildest, character in the play.

Shaw greatly admired the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen in attacking middle-class conventionality and hypocrisy. Indeed, it is this conventionality and hypocrisy that Shaw targets in *Arms and the Man*. For one thing, Shaw makes fun of the high-class pretensions of the Petkoff family. In the stage directions to Act I, Shaw describes Raina's bedroom as "half rich Bulgarian and half cheap Viennese." (Act I, 15) He describes Catherine as "a very splendid specimen of the wife of a mountain farmer, but is determined to be a Viennese lady, and to that end wears a fashionable tea gown on all occasions." (Act I, 16)

When Raina informs Bluntschli that he is in the house of Petkoff, "the richest and best known [family] in our country," (Act I, 31) she expects him to be impressed. She brags that her father holds the highest command of any Bulgarian in the Russian army, "my father holds the highest command of any Bulgarian in our army. He is [proudly] a Major" (Act I, 31) but it is only the rank of major, which does not say much for the Bulgarians. Raina also brags that hers is the only private house in Bulgaria that has two rows of windows and a flight of stairs to go up and down by. (Act I, 31) When Bluntschli feigns being impressed, she adds that they have the only library in Bulgaria. She condescendingly tells Bluntschli that he has shown great ignorance, but the audience recognizes that Raina is the one who is pathetically ignorant. She advises Bluntschli that she tells him all these things so that he will know he is not in the house of ignorant country folk. As proof, she declares that she goes to the opera in Bucharest every year and has spent a month in Vienna. Bluntschli says, "I saw at once that you knew the world." (Act I, 31) Bertolt Brecht wrote in 1959 in his article "Ovation for Shaw" in *Modern Drama* that Shaw insisted "on the prerogative of every man to act decently, logically, and with a sense of humor," (Brecht: 1959, 185) and that a person was obligated to behave this way even in the face of opposition. Apparently, Shaw gave this attribute to Bluntschli.

Bernard Shaw further shows the vulgarity of the Petkoffs when Raina explains "Bulgarians of really good standing—people in our position—wash their hands nearly every day." (Act I, 32) Raina thinks that simply washing hands is a sign of a gentleman, not knowing that her primitive lifestyle sets her standards low. In Act II, Major Petkoff blames his wife's chronic sore throat on washing her neck every day.

Catherine: *Oh, my usual sore throats; that's all.*

Petkoff: *[with conviction] That comes from washing your neck everyday. Ive often told you so.*

(Act II, 38-39)

His lecture on the foolishness of frequent bathing is a further sign from Shaw that we are dealing with people who have only recently barely risen above the great-unwashed masses. Throwing in the comments about washing being the fault of the English whose climate makes them so dirty is a playful barb at Shaw's own audience.

The repeated reference to their library once again shows that the Petkoffs think that all they need to be gentry is to have a room called the library. Putting a bell in it just heightens the silliness of their pretensions. When Petkoff asks why they cannot just shout for their servants, Catherine replies that she has learned that civilized people never shout for their servants. He counters that he has learned that civilized people do not hang their laundry out to dry where other people can see it. Catherine finds that concept absurd and declares that really refined people do not notice such things, as if she knew. Obviously, neither of them have any idea what refinement is, especially if they have only recently begun learning proper habits.

Catherine: *You are a barbarian at heart still, Paul. I hope you behaved yourself before all those Russian officers.*

Petkoff: *I did my best. I took care to let them know that we have a library.*

Catherine: *Ah; but you didn't tell them that we have an electric bell in it? I have had one put up.*

Petkoff: *Whats an electric bell?*

Catherine: *You touch a button; something tinkles in the kitchen; and then Nicola comes up.*

Petkoff: *Why not shout for them?*

Catherine: *Civilized people never shout for their servants. Ive learnt that while you were away.*

Petkoff: *Well, I'll tell you something Ive learnt too. Civilized people don't hang out their washing to dry where visitors can see it; so youd better have all that [indicating the clothes on the bushes] put somewhere else.*

Catherine: *Oh, that's absurd, Paul: I don't believe really refined people notice such things.*

(Act II, 39)

Bertolt Brecht, in his essay "Ovation for Shaw," wrote that "Probably all of [Shaw's] characters, in all their traits, are the result of Shaw's delight in upsetting our habitual prejudices." (Brecht; 1959, 87) For example, Saranoff assumes that Bluntschli is bourgeois because Bluntschli's father is a hotel and livery keeper. Bluntschli is too humble to brag about his father's holdings. Louka challenges Saranoff's prejudices when she says, "It is so hard to know what a gentleman considers right" (Act II, 47) after Saranoff jumps

back and forth between familiarity with her and putting a barrier between them because he is supposedly a gentleman and she only a maid. In one minute, Louka is worth chasing; in another, she is “an abominable little clod of common clay, with the soul of a servant.” (Act II, 49) But Louka retorts that it does not matter what she is because she has now found out that he is made of the same clay. Shaw is, of course, making the point that virtue and baseness are not the properties of any one class but that we are all human.

Louka is angry at a society that tries to restrict her to a certain ‘place.’ The audience can tell that Louka is better suited to being a mistress than a maid. Nicola tries to convince her that a rigid structure of classes is part of the natural order of things, and that people are more content when they accept their place and stop torturing themselves with useless aspirations. He says,

*Never you mind my soul; but just listen to my advice. If you want to be a lady, your present behavior to me wont do at all, unless when we're alone. It's too sharp and impudent; and impudence is a sort of familiarity: it shews affection for me. And don't you try being high and mighty with me, either. Youre like all country girls: you think it's genteel to treat a servant the way I treat a stableboy... The way to get on as a lady is the same as the way to get on as a servant: youve got to know your place: that's the secret of it.* (Act III, 68)

In Act II, Nicola advises Louka how to be faithful and moderate with the people she is working with:

*Well, you take my advice and be respectful; and make the mistress feel that no matter what you know or don't know, she can depend on you to hold your tongue and serve the family faithfully.* (Act II, 36)

Louka replies disdainfully that Nicola has “the soul of a servant.” (Act II, 37), he may have capitulated to social restrictions, but she will not. One of the main issues *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* deals with is that women should not fall for society’s dictum that they be self-sacrificing, but should instead take care of themselves first so that they could then be in a position to help others. (Shaw: 1986, 61-62) Louka is an example of a woman following this advice.

Louka combines clear prosaic vision with imagination, ambition, and romance, and succeeds thereby in rising above servility. Between Nicola and Louka there is a Pygmalion-Galatea relationship foreshadowing Higgins and Eliza. Nicola has taught her not to overuse make-up like common Bulgarian girls, and to be clean and dainty like a lady. (Act III, 67) But, like Higgins, he has created a monster beyond his control—he has made a real woman out of a servant. His advice promotes social stratification: “The way to get on as a lady is the same as the way to get on as a servant: youve got to know your place.” (Act III, 68) To Louka, this is but “cold-blooded wisdom,” and one may anticipate Eliza’s words in *Pygmalion*: “the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but

how she's treated." (Act V, 97) As Nicola introduces in a natural fashion a didactic element regarding the social and economic dependence of the servant class, Louka brings into question the superstructure of gentility. She sees clearly that Nicola has the soul of a servant and that the effect of such souls is to reinforce class distinctions. She views such distinctions as not very flattering to the social elite. The moral laxity of the upper classes tends to put her on a par with them. This feeds her natural ambition. Thus she can say familiarly to Sergius, "No: I don't want your kisses. Gentlefolk are all alike: you making love to me behind Miss Raina's back; and she doing the same behind yours." (Act II, 47) She has the insight all along that Raina will marry Bluntschli if she has the chance. Obviously, biological drives are more basic than "higher love," and this fact encourages Louka's hope of climbing above her class to marry Sergius.

Class distinctions become all cluttered at the end of the play, and obstructions are broken, as Shaw hoped they would be in real life. Nicola becomes a servant to a servant, or it is a compatriot, when he declares that Louka has "a soul above her station; and I have been no more than her confidential servant." (Act III, 80) Then Sergius becomes engaged to Louka, so the class barrier between them comes down. In a further blow for equality, Louka addresses Raina by her first name when she says, "I have done Raina no harm." (Act III, 81) Raina and her mother are indignant at the liberty a mere servant has taken, but Louka says, "I have a right to call her Raina: she calls me Louka." (Act III, 81) It seemed logical to Shaw, and he hoped his audience would see the sense of this peer treatment. The final jab at snobbery is taken when

Catherine objects to Raina marrying Bluntschli until she finds out that he is rich. Then he becomes instantly acceptable. The hypocrisy of basing marriage on money instead of love could not have been lost on the audience.

Linguistically speaking, throughout *Arms and the Man*, slight variances are used in the speech of the characters to indicate class discrimination and pretension. Undoubtedly, the language of any play is regarded as a manifestation of the character in interaction with the playwright in exposing the given premises and themes. It is clear that Shaw, a noted socialist, has a great deal of concern about class issues and instead of making the reader keenly aware of these notions through any direct mention, he uses their dialogue as well as cues within the setting to reveal these elements. "Despite the prominence of debate and speechmaking in his plays, one sometimes forgets that before Shaw-the-playwright came Shaw-the-debater and public speaker. All were platform spellbinders". His writing style is thus very critical of the Victorian-era society yet instead of doing this explicitly, he relies on gestures, dialogue, and setting to set the stage for the debate. His "public speaking" would, in this sense be limited to the voices of his characters who come from variable class backgrounds and have a system of language that is suitable for their class. Only through this mode can Shaw open a platform for class debates.

At the very beginning of the play, the reader is already cued into the class differences that will dominate the text until the end. For instance, the introduction of Raina

in the play is not one that values her inner life, but those of outer appearances, something that is of great significance to her and her family. Without dialogue, she is introduced in one of the important quotes from *Arms and the Man*,

*On the balcony, a young lady, intensely conscious of the romantic beauty of the night, and of the fact that her own youth and beauty is a part of it, is on the balcony, gazing at the snowy Balkans. She is covered by a long mantle of furs, worth, on a moderate estimate, about three times the furniture of the room.* (Act I, 15-16 )

Here, it is not important who she is or what she thinks about her class position, but rather it is made clear that she is within an upper class and endeavors to uphold the outward appearances through her luxurious clothing while the representative items of her “inner life” (in this case her bedroom) are shoddy and unremarkable. Without being told the first thing about this character’s thoughts, it is clear that the reader should be immediately attentive to class distinctions through outward appearances. It should also be noted that this setting is beautiful, we are not expected to focus on the beauty in a traditional way, but rather to pay attention to the social statement—that there is a woman who obviously pays more for her clothes than the upkeep of her living quarters. In the mind of one critic,

*The world, as he [Shaw] looks out upon it, is a painful spectacle to his eyes. Pity and indignation move him. He is not sentimental, as some writers are, but the facts grind his soul... in a word, art has an end beyond itself; and the object of Shaw’s art in particular is to make men think, to make them uncomfortable, to convict them of sin.* (Salter: 1908, 446)

This is an especially succinct observation in this scene since there is opportunity for sentimentality and romanticism (since she is framed by a lovely setting) but this is not enough for Shaw; he must shift the object of the reader’s gaze away from physical beauty to the darker world of class and character.

Descriptions go beyond setting as well in *Arms and the Man*. The class of characters is not only revealed and critiqued by the setting itself, but by the narrated actions and stage directions for particular characters. For instance, consider the graceful language and the almost fairy-tale nature of the “dance” of Raina and her fiancée as they simply sit down for dinner. The narrator states in one of the important quotes from the play,

*Sergius leads Raina forward with splendid gallantry, as if she were a queen. When they come to the table, she turns to him with a bend of the head; he bows; and thus they separate, he coming to his place, and she going behind her father’s chair.* (Act II, 42)

This is a very detailed and complex routine these characters act out and is representative of the codified ideals of chivalric behavior typically associated with the elite. This stands in sharp contrast to the plodding nature of the exchanges between Nicola and Louka, whose settings and stage directions are not filled with the same dreamy interludes. While Sergius and Raina literally appear to dance in the aforementioned scene, the lower class scenes of the two servants are much less striking, the narrator only stating where they are in physical

space and their language being stunted and free from the dramatic connotations and Byron-like feel of the upper class characters.

This same move in possibilities, from the potential sentimentality to the social critique, is apparent in terms of language as well as setting descriptions. According to Stanley Weintraub,

*Characters whose impulses are conventional or traditional will use language reflecting their mechanical responses and will be satirized accordingly, while characters who possess a Shavian vitality will express that spontaneity through a freedom not only from moral and ethical formulas but from verbal convention as well.*

(Weintraub: 1970, 215)

This is evident when a contrast of two particular classes is presented in the play. First, it should be noted that those of the lower class, especially Bluntschli and the servant girl Nicola, are all exciting and interesting characters. They possess the “Shavian vitality” and their language is free from the ornament and needless over-romanticized talk of the upper classes. Consider, as a comparison, the meaning that is compressed, while remaining vital when Louka reproaches her servant friend, saying with “searching scorn” no less, “You have the soul of a servant, Nicola” (Act II, 37). Some of the most powerful emotion in the text is present in these short but potent thesis statements. The soldier tells Raina, “I’ve no ammunition. What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead; and I finished the last cake of that hour ago.” (Act I, 25). In many ways, it seems as though these characters with clipped but highly powerful statements are much like Shaw. They are making massive overarching statements about their world without seeming to do it, as if any implied social critique might have been incidental. These short bursts of meaning for much farther to reveal genuine sentiment than Raina’s long-winded proclamations of love when she confesses, breathlessly and dramatically,

*Well, it came into my head just as he was holding me in his arms and looking into my eyes, that perhaps we only had our heroic idea because we are so fond of reading Byron and Pushkin, and because we were so delighted with the opera that season at Bucharest. Real life is so seldom like that—indeed never, as far as I knew it then.*

(Act I, 17)

While at the end she makes a powerful statement, she is too caught up in the class-driven notions of how a lady should speak to be able to make a direct and concise statement that has the significance of the aforementioned quotes from the lower class characters.

In sum, Shaw is not obvious in his social critiques in this play. His style requires that the reader understands not only the varied language of his characters, but also the deeper meanings behind the settings and speech. While a particular scenic description might seem, on first glance, to offer a beautiful setting or something simple, underneath these images are deeper layers of meaning that are geared towards society. In terms of dialogue and *Arms and the Man*, Shaw writes his characters as complete individuals whose class and



deep thoughts lay masked behind relatively simple-sounding speeches. The ultimate effect of this writing style is that the reader becomes concerned in class argument (as well as other equally prominent debates about the nature of war as well) and is left with a moving story as well as something more to consider. In more broad terms, the play reflects some of the intense class conflicts of the day and addresses several of Shaw's ideas about society and politics as well.

As a free thinker, Bernard Shaw supported women's rights, equality of income, abolition of private property, and change in the voting system. His plays are witty discussions, with conflicts of ideas rather than of neuroses and physical passions. In his more fifty plays, he sought to provoke his audiences intellectually by making them laugh. Critics, writers and theatergoers alike recognized Bernard Shaw as innovative, intelligent, humorous, audacious and controversial. As a playwright he handled the most contentious and often relevant social and political problems of his age such as the religious hypocrisy, prostitution, sexual discrimination, class distinction, morality, capitalism and poverty. Part of the realistic school of writing, Shaw disliked the romantic and sentimental Victorian style and content of the late nineteenth century. He believed that theatre should be dominated by realism and should express opinions on social and political issues. On the other hand, Shaw's works are often criticized by other critics for lacking dramatic action, interesting stories and are sometimes regarded as socialistic sermons or a forum to teach and preach rather than lifelike pieces. It is true that if one goes to a performance of a Shavian play, one will be given a lesson in how Shaw believed life should be lived. However, this lesson will be given with a dose of laughter and several witty thumps on the head, which is where Shaw aimed. Shaw is undoubtedly best known for his comedies, particularly *Major Barbara*, *Pygmalion*, and *Arms and the Man*. This judgment seems to be unfair, Shaw's characterization may not have the breath and depth of Shakespeare's; but it is full of variety. There are quite a number of well-drawn characters that have made deep impressions on the audience, taking a random selection, such as Mrs. Warren in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and Mr. Undershaft in *Major Barbara*. Shaw gently mortified his audiences into recognizing their own deficiencies by creating characters who were stereotypes personifying the problems and dilemmas of their society.

Shaw's *Quintessence* was, among other things, a clever semantic ploy to regain the initiative for art in a world increasingly dominated by scientific materialism. Artists could be greater Realists, Shaw implied, than scientists and businessmen, for reality is more what the poet "envisions" and less what the materialist "observes." His complaint against literary realism was that it too often was a sellout to literal-minded, surface-obsessed scientific materialism. Ibsen felt the same way but was forced by circumstances to shift from the poetic, heroic drama he favored to mimetic realism, which he then subverted with a secret symbolic- expressionistic method that used surface reality to evoke a greater reality. Quintessentially, Shaw thought, Ibsen's priorities were correct, the poet's vision mattering more to him than mere scientific observation.

Now, it is the time to answer the most problematic question of Shaw's Ibsenism: did Shaw's Drama of Ideas any better embody Ibsenism? Not as far as surface appearances are concerned, but perhaps characteristically it did. Both Ibsen and Shaw emphasized vision over observation. Both visions were of the rottenness of the old order and the need to start over. Both partly embodied their visions in parodied versions of the old forms, the familiarity with the old forms making their works more accessible to many, but, at the same time, the satiric charge given the content exploding the conventions, necessary to the regenerating of both drama and society. And though Ibsen's perspective was more tragic than comic and Shaw's more comic than tragic, both employed a tragicomic blend to express unusually comprehensive and dynamic visions.

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